REVIEWS ESSENTIAL MUSICMAN, RIKKERS, SANDBERG, YAMAHA AND MARKBASS GEAR ON TEST!

Bass Guitar Magazine

THE UK'S ... BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

65 KILLER PAGES OF ESSENTIAL BASS INSPIRATION

ROYAL BLOOD

MIKE KERR TAKES US BEHIND THE PLANET'S HOTTEST BASS-LINES!

INTERVIEWS

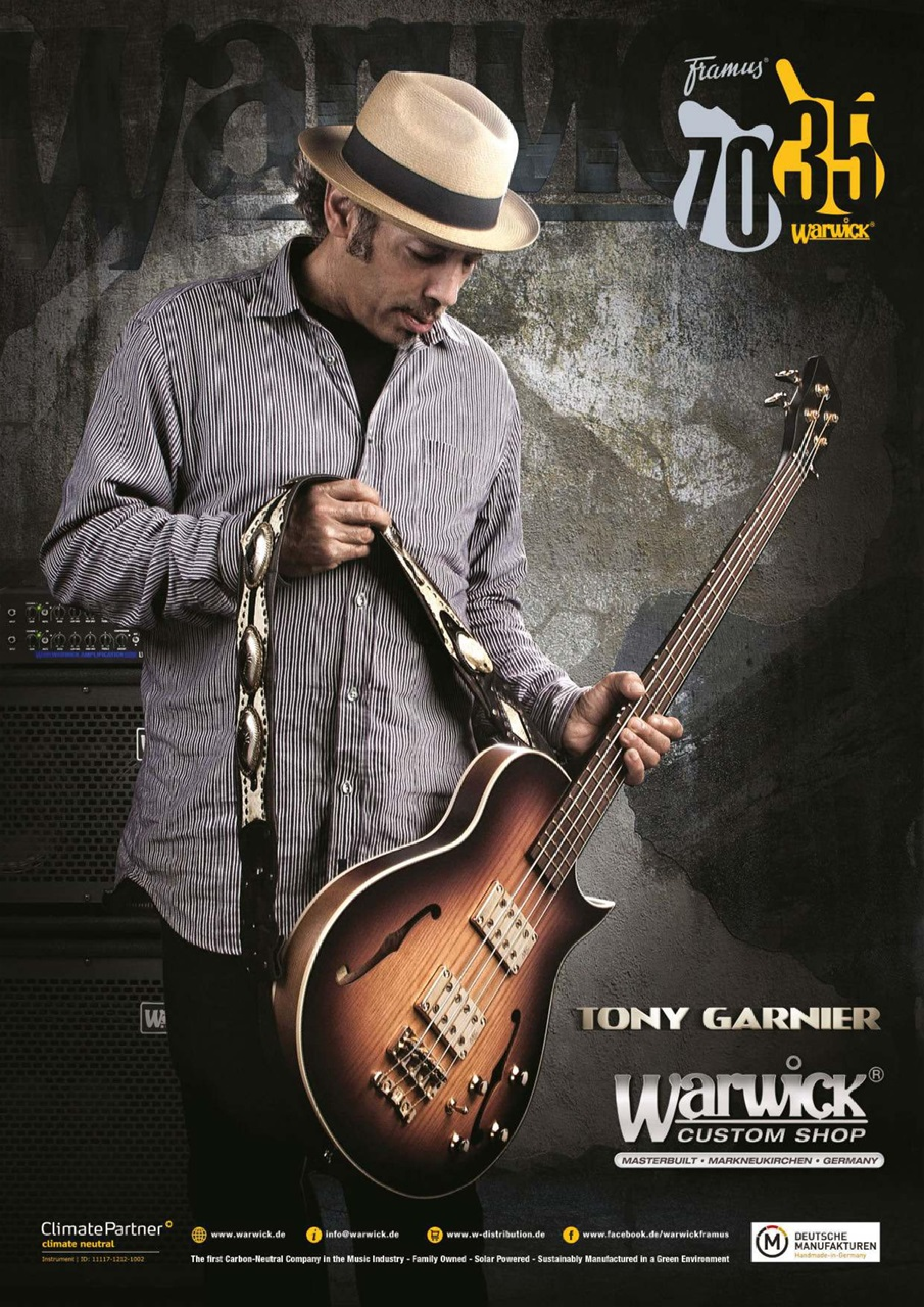
- BILLY SHEEHAN
- CHUCK RAINEY
- NICK OLIVERI
- SEAN SCOTT Creeper
- STEVE QUERALT Ride

REVIEWED

SANDBERG CALIFORNIA IDA NIELSEN

Future

SYNERGY
DISTRIBUTION
sandberg
www.synergydistribution.co.uk
www.configurator.sandberg-guitars.de



Framus
70
35
Warwick
TONY GARNIER
Warwick
CUSTOM SHOP
MASTERBUILT • MARKNEUKIRCHEN • GERMANY
ClimatePartner
climate neutral
Instrument | ID: 11117-1212-1002
www.warwick.de
info@warwick.de
www.w-distribution.de
www.facebook.de/warwickframus
The first Carbon-Neutral Company in the Music Industry - Family Owned - Solar Powered - Sustainably Manufactured in a Green Environment
DEUTSCHE MANUFAKTUREN
Handmade-in-Germany

CONTENTS

ISSUE 146 AUGUST 2017

EDITOR Joel McIver, joel.mciver@futurenet.com
MANAGING EDITOR Kate Puttick
TECHNICAL CONSULTANT Stuart Clayton
CONTRIBUTORS Tony Bacon, Angus Batey, Bob Battersby, Duff Battye, Andy Baxter, Nick Beggs, Jeff Berlin, Jamie Blaine, Silvia Bluejay, Mike Brooks, Joe Burcaw, Dave Clarke, Stuart Clayton, Ben Cooper, Joe Daly, Jon D'Auria, Hywel Davies, Daryl Easlea, David Etheridge, Mike Flynn, Paul Geary, Ian Glasper, Joel Graham, Ruth Goller, Spencer Grady, Paolo Gregoletto, Hugh Gulland, Chris Hanby, Huw Hopkins, Andy Hughes, Ken Hunt, Kevin Johnson, Bill Kopp, Steve Lawson, Phil Mann, Lee Marlow, Julian Marszalek, George Martin, Michael McKeegan, Stewart McKinsey, Greg Moffitt, Chris Mugan, Douglas Mullen, Ellen O'Reilly, Franc O'Shea, Harry Paterson, Dayal Patterson, Mike Poggione, Raz Rauf, Alison Richter, Steven Rosen, Teri Saccone, Kevin Sanders, Amit Sharma, Ken Sharp, Joe Shooman, Rob Statham, Scott Surine, Jon Thorne, Freddy Villano, Ray Walker, Alex Webster, Sam Wise
ADVERTISING SALES Guy Meredith
GRAPHIC DESIGN Steve Dawson
COVER IMAGE Adam Gasson
STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY Eckie, Olly Curtis and Stephen Kelly

SUBSCRIPTION RATE UK £69
For all subscription offers and overseas prices visit www.bassguitarmagazine.com or call 0344 8482852

©Future Publishing Limited 2017. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. The registered office of Future Publishing Limited is Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this magazine is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. Readers are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this magazine. If you submit unsolicited material to us, you automatically grant Future a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at your risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agent or subcontractors shall be liable for loss or damage

Future

Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 57 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet & smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR). www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Penny Ladkin-Brand

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

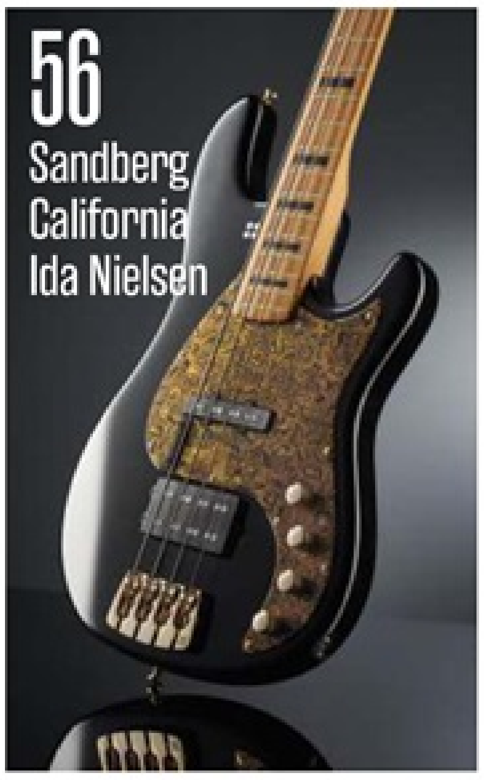
Whatever you think of Brighton duo Royal Blood's riff-heavy tunes, there's no denying the twosome's commitment to The Rock or the speed of their ascent to the public eye. Here in the bass community, we're punching the air in sheer glee at how massive Mike Kerr and his drummer accomplice Ben Thatcher have become: their success is a total validation of the versatility and sheer cool of the bass guitar. Kerr doesn't just sing and play bass: he's pioneered a split-signal system that allows him to create and shape guitar and bass tones, all with four strings, a pile of effects and a Fender Jaguar. Among the dozens of magazine covers which he's adorned since RB's second album smashed its way to the top of the charts back in June, this one is where he most belongs, we reckon.

This month's issue also features amazing chats with bass legends such as Billy Sheehan and Chuck Rainey as well as red-hot newbies such as Creeper's Sean Scott. Sometime Queens Of The Stone Age bassist Nick Oliveri and Fender collector Steve Schlueter say hi, while we supply the ultimate Ned Steinberger tribute and a warm welcome back to Steve Queralt of Ride. Reviews-wise, we've cast the net wide with a sub-£400 Sterling Musicman, a unique Rikkers costing the thick end of four grand, the sumptuous new signature Sandberg from Prince bassist Ida Nielsen and all points between.

Oh, and if your aim is to be the best bassist you can be, you know what to do. Head directly for our acclaimed tuition section, where the Trio Of Doom – Steve Lawson, Stuart Clayton and Phil Mann – are waiting for you with the coolest bass lessons known to man- and womankind. Get to it, and we'll see you in August!

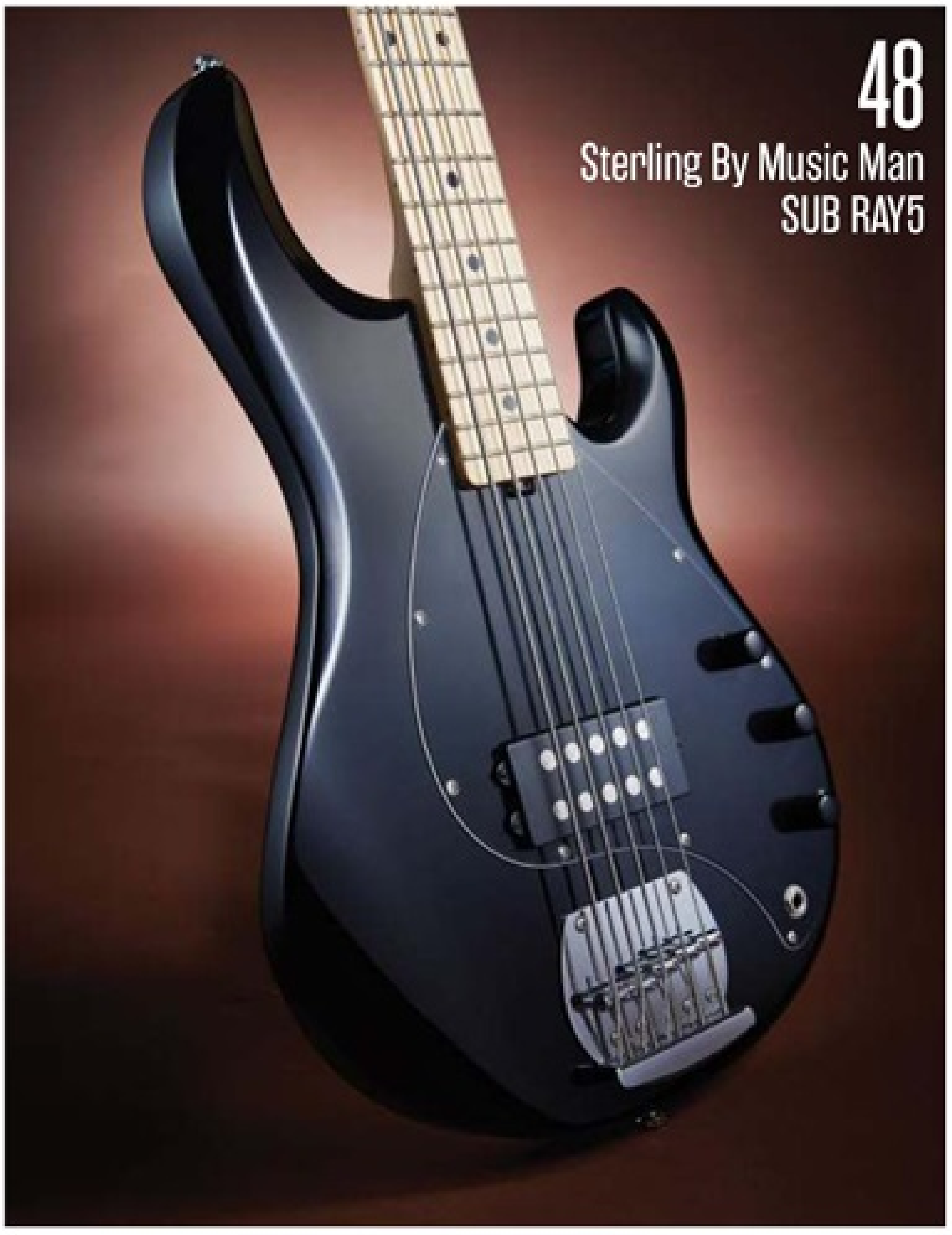
Joel McIver, editor

52 Rikkers Local Wood Treeline Singlecut 5



56 Sandberg California Ida Nielsen

Pic: Adam Gasson



48 Sterling By Music Man SUB RAY5

Gear

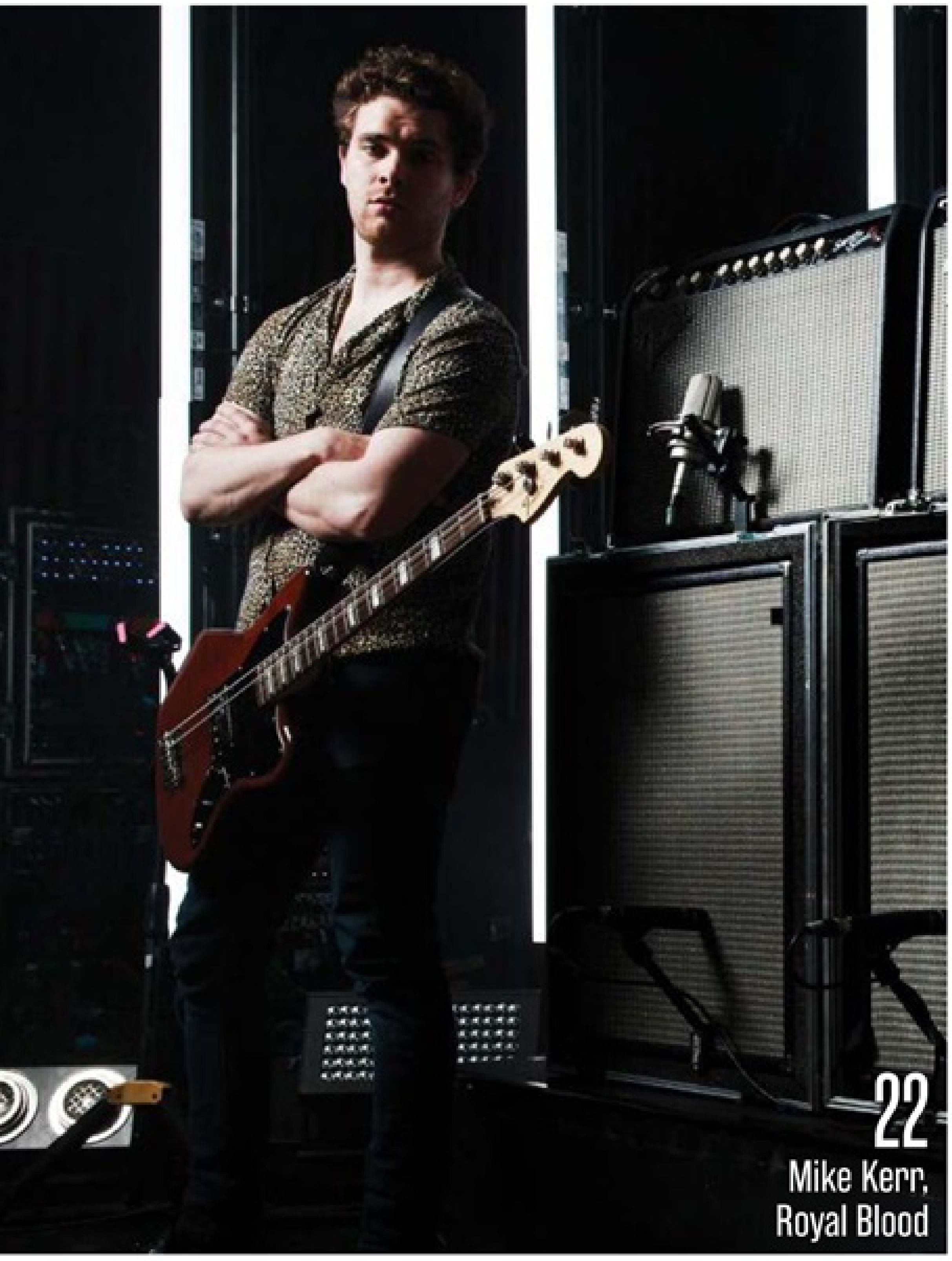
48 Sterling By Music Man SUB RAY5
Less than £400 for a Stingray variant? Let's have it, suggests Mike Brooks...

52 Rikkers Local Wood Treeline Singlecut 5
...before branching out with this unique £3800 creation from the Netherlands

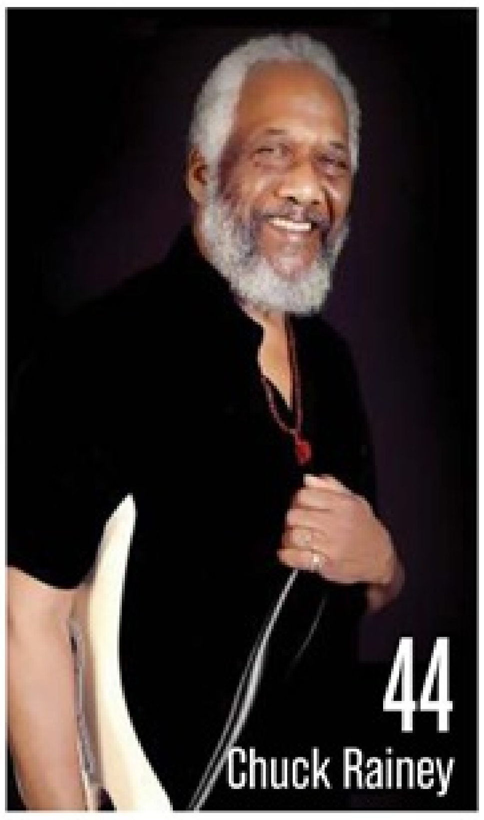
56 Sandberg California Ida Nielsen
Prince's final bassist gets her own, awesome bass; Joel McIver gets his funk on

60 Yamaha TRBX305MGR and TRBX504TBN
Two Yamahas undergo the tender touch of Brooks

64 Markbass Evo I head
Kev Sanders plugs into the brand new Markbass top


22
Mike Kerr, Royal Blood

32
Sean Scott
Creeper


44
Chuck Rainey

Tuition

70 Frontline
Four pro bassists offer you their collective wisdom. Get smart here

BEGINNER
74 Steve Lawson
The great Steve Lawson guides us through a beginners' bass journey like no other. Get those fingers flexing and let's go!

INTERMEDIATE
78 Stuart Clayton
Feeling ready to take the next step? Meet Commander Clayton, your guide through intermediate bass territory. Pick it up!

ADVANCED
84 Phil Mann
Up for some bass Armageddon? Of course you are! Buckle up, Captain Phil Mann is at the controls for our advanced tuition section...

90 Classic Albums
Mike Brooks gets his umbrella out for some *Heavy Weather*, a Pastorius masterpiece

SUBSCRIBE NOW
DETAILS PAGE 82

Bassists

22 Mike Kerr, Royal Blood
The hottest rock band on earth? Arguably. The hottest rock band on earth fronted by a bass player? Possibly. The hottest band on earth fronted by a bassist who splits his signal to create guitar parts, and sells out arenas in doing so, even though he's only been playing bass for five years? Most definitely! Mike Kerr sits down with Joel McIver to discuss just how the hell he's pulled it off...

32 Sean Scott, Creeper
Your big-charting punk-rock-metal bands don't get bigger than Creeper. Hywel Davies meets bassist Sean Scott

34 Billy Sheehan, Mr Big
Like you don't know who Billy Sheehan is... one of the planet's most accomplished bassists updates Mike Brooks on what he's up to with the re-formed Mr Big

36 Steve Queralt, Ride
Shoegaze alert! Indie darlings™ Ride return; bassist Steve looks up

38 Ned Steinberger
Jim Reilly tells the tale of the amazing Ned Steinberger, whose bass designs with Spector and his own brand made him a true pioneer in our field

42 Nick Oliveri, Bloodclot
After Kyuss, Queens Of The Stone Age and the Dwarves, king hellraiser Oliveri returns with a new band, Bloodclot

44 Chuck Rainey
The veteran session bassist looks back with Ellen O'Reilly

46 Steve Schlueter
The owner of the world's premier Fender bass collection explains all to Hywel Davies

38
Nick Oliveri
Bloodclot

THE LOW DOWN

News and views from the bass world, collated by *BGM*'s team of intrepid newshounds

Pic by Tina K

GIZ IT

Supergroups come and supergroups go, but one of particular relevance to our community has just been announced. Gizmodrome, whose self-titled debut album will be released on September 15, features Mark King of Level 42 alongside a stellar cast of collaborators. Stewart Copeland of the Police plays drums; former King Crimson frontman Adrian Belew is on guitar; and Italian composer and arranger Vittorio Cosma plays keyboards. A debut single, 'Amaka Pipa' is available in demo form on Youtube and Spotify and features some slinky treated bass from our chum King. Watch out for a cover interview with the great man in our next issue.

www.facebook.com/gizmodrome

WAIT, WOOT?

The mighty Victor Wooten, perhaps the most technically accomplished bassist on the planet at this point, is best known for his funk and jazz chops, so his latest announcement has caused more than a few bassists' jaws to drop. He'll be playing bass on the as-yet-untitled new album by Nitro, a hair-metal band from the 80s who are returning after 24 years of inactivity. Like Wooten, the other musicians in the new Nitro line-up are renowned for their musical skills: original singer Jim Gillette and shred guitarist extraordinaire Michael Angelo Batio are also joined by drummer Chris Adler of Lamb Of God.

"I'm so happy to be included as part of the new Nitro project," said the Woot. "I've been a fan of Michael Angelo Batio for decades. Jim Gillette and Chris Adler are just as amazing. They're causing me to have to step up my game. Fans will be thrilled to hear what we are coming up with – I'm really excited about it!'

Adler stated: "I have been in awe of Victor for many, many years. His musical gifts, which are second to none, are matched by his ability to inspire. I am giddy, humbled and amazed to have the chance to share music with, and learn from, him. Hearing him play music – or even speak about playing music for that matter, is truly a gift. Playing this material with him is mind-blowing, listening to what he brings to this is game-changing."

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised at Victor's enthusiasm for matters heavy and indeed, metal. Last time he was on our cover (*BGM* 133, August 2016) he expressed a keen appreciation for the bass playing of David Ellefson of Megadeth, coincidentally a band in which Adler has also played. Now, will he be headbanging on stage?

www.facebook.com/NitroMetalBand

SHOP TALK

A new feature in which we meet a renowned bass-maker.

This month: Alan Cringean, AC Guitars

AC Guitars, the company based in Moffat, Scotland founded by luthier Alan Cringean, is a regular exhibitor at the London Bass Guitar Show. This year their stand was in the entrance hall, among the European Guitar Builders, a less noisy area than the main hall. ACG wasn't sharing a space with the official East UK stand, but John East was there with Cringean, ready to answer questions and explain details of his designs; once again, all this year's ACG basses had East preamps built in.

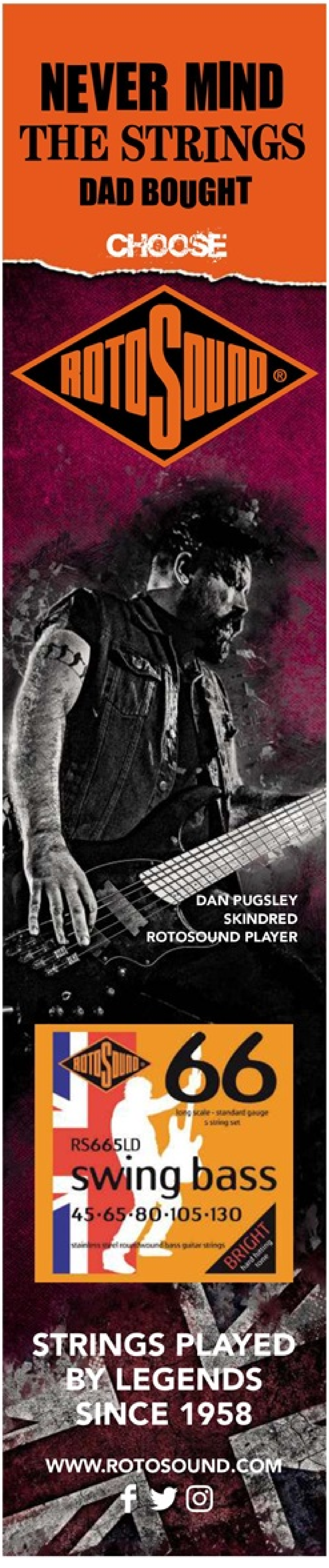
In addition to the much-loved ACG models that we have come to expect, this year Cringean had brought to the show a new model with a more traditional shape: his own take on a Precision. This bass is deliberately less ACG-like in look, and can be set to produce a great P-Bass sound, as well as deliver the variety of sounds that we more immediately associate with ACG basses.

"This is the first one of a new type of bass I prepared for the show – a Retro B," explains Cringean, showing me the single P pickup, four-string show model. "It's not one of my more usual shapes. I've been working on it in conjunction with bassist Colin Cunningham to produce what will be regarded as a more traditional instrument."

He continues: "It's targeted mainly to people like Colin who are working musicians and, quite often, come to a show with a bass which is a little more unusual in look or sound; that's not always appreciated by music directors. So we wanted to produce an instrument which is more acceptable to other people rather that to the bass players themselves. That's the basic idea behind that."

For this new instrument, Cringean has followed the traditional construction: a single-piece neck with the standard width, and a swamp ash body with a coloured maple top. The neck is lacquered with a thin, non-sticky, non-polyester layer. "The East electronics ensure that the Retro is still a modern bass," he adds. "In the John East Retro B electronics, you have a volume and tone which work in passive, so when this bass is in passive, it's a P-Bass. You can flick the switch, and you go into active; that brings in the top control, which becomes a bass treble when turned one way, and a mid control when turned the other way. The electronics also have a 'deep' function, which can be set at four internal frequencies or levels. The other switch is for selecting serial, parallel and split coil. I've tried to make the best bass that I can, but not attract any attention from anybody that may think otherwise."

Many LBGS visitors' eyes were also irresistibly attracted to the Salace Fretless 5 in white with black veins, sitting next to the Retro P in all its beauty. "That's actually one of my oldest designs," smiles Cringean. "I think it must be my second bass design, and has been going strong ever since. That's the most typical, recognisable ACG shape, because it's been around the longest." And boy, do we love it. Silvia Bluejay



REVOLVER

Every month we tell you the bass-line we can't stop listening to

THIS MONTH: Jessie J, 'Domino' (2011)

Three bassists – Butch Coleman, Steve Octave and Ashton Thomas – are credited with playing bass on British pop poppet's Jessie J's 2011 debut album *Who You Are*. We don't know which chap played on the giant-lunged warbler's top tune 'Domino', so apologies to whichever one actually did lay down this splendid, funky line. Sure, it's not prog-rock in 13/4 or jazz-death metal fusion, so we feel a bit guilty admitting that we like it, but what the heck, it sounds great after a pot of coffee/glass of claret/[insert stimulant of preference]. And that's the whole point of pop music, surely.

Win

Nab one of two ace Eden Astro Flange pedals, worth around £99 each and recipients of a glowing review in last month's *BGM*, courtesy of the nice folks at Marshall by answering this simple question:

Eden was founded in 1976 – but where?
A Minehead
B Minnesota
C Middlesbrough

Answers to http://bit.ly/2tFe8pv by September 3.

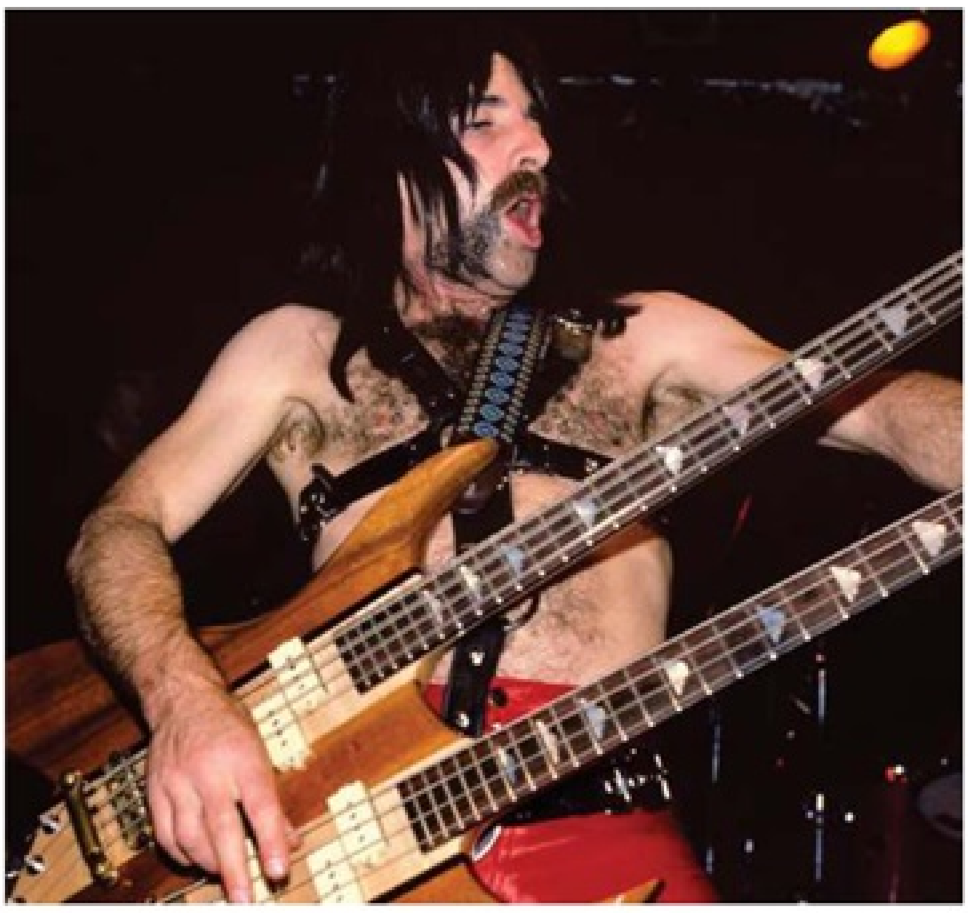
Won

Stephen Partlett, Edwin Mole and Barry Skeates win a copy of Tony Bacon and Barrie Moorhouse's *Bass Book*. Thanks to all who entered.

SHEAR POETRY

The mighty Harry Shearer, voice actor for *The Simpsons* and a veritable Leg End in bass world thanks to his portrayal of the immortal Derek Smalls in the 1984 'rockumentary' *This Is Spinal Tap*, has a solo album on the way, said to be titled *Smalls* (anyone aware of the Northern English definition of the word 'smalls' as 'underwear' will find this amusing). Apparently Peter Frampton and Donald Fagen of Steely Dan will be guesting on the record, which includes a song about erectile dysfunction called 'Memo To Willie' (brilliant!) but its most immediate value is that it gives us an excuse to run this picture.

www.harryshearer.com



BASSWATCH

Every month, keen bass-spotter Ray Walker brings us an online bargain.

Roscoe Century Standard 6 £1,600
https://tinyurl.com/yarssvv4

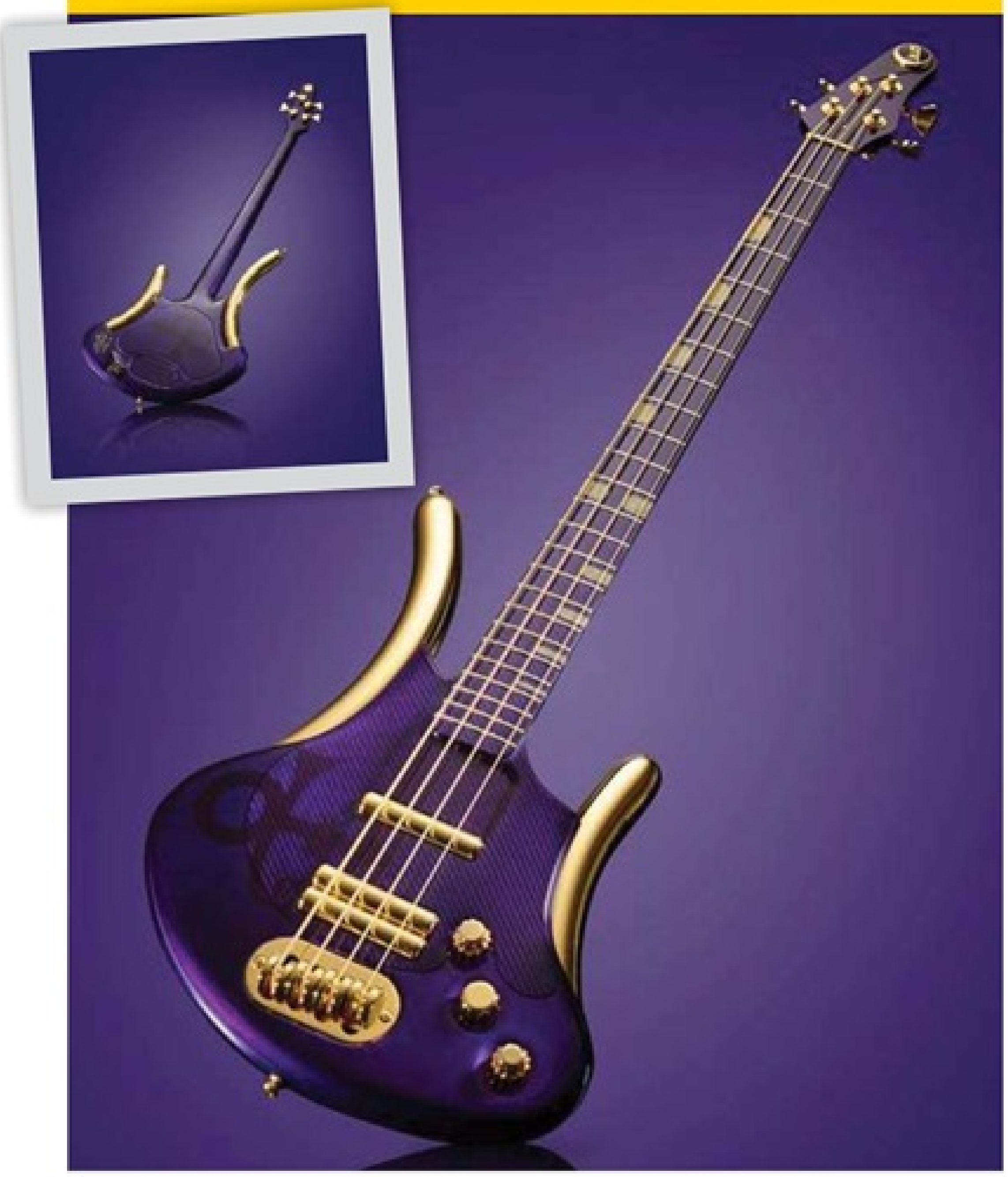
Up this month is a head-turner of the six-string variety – behold the Roscoe Century Standard six-string. This not-so-little beaut is comprised of a swamp ash body with satin finish, a three-piece maple neck and a pau ferro fingerboard. It's also nicely kitted out with a pair of Bartolini soapbar pickups and a three-band Bartolini 18-volt preamp which features a pickup gain trim pot on the reverse control cavity. The beautiful gold hardware complements the finish nicely and the lightweight Hipshot tuners help keep the weight down. Just what my collection is missing, if you ask me...

PURPLE REIGN

Shortly before his untimely death in 2016, the great singer-songwriter Prince received a custom Purple Special guitar from Gus Guitars. He liked it so much that he commissioned luthier Simon Farmer to build him a bass version. Now, a year on, that bass is complete. Like the guitar, it features chrome fibre elements in the construction, holographic gold fibre inlays, purple candy paint and gold-plating on all metal work. Based on Gus Guitars' G3 Four Active model, the Purple Special packs a Gus Tube humbucker and single coil pickups with a three-band active EQ: Prince's 'love symbol' appears on the front and back of the body.

"There's obviously an overriding sadness to the project in the fact that Prince won't get to see or play the bass," says Farmer, "and this is a thought that's been with me throughout the construction process, but I felt it was important for me to finish it and to show people what I've built, and for the bass to honour his legacy as one of music's most dazzling performers."

www.gusguitars.com



ROUTE 64

The veteran American luthiers Danelectro have announced a new '64 Bass model, featuring a German carved top with a single-coil pickup at the neck and a pair of lipstick units which together form a humbucker in bridge position. According to the press release, this results "in a range of tones never before heard on a bass", which is an interesting claim and one we'll be investigating in a forthcoming review.

www.jhs.co.uk/brands/danelectro

BASSICALLY SPEAKING

Bassists reveal the tricks of their trade faster than a snapping D string

© Sally Newhouse

GEAR
BASSES Fender Precision
EFFECTS EHX Microsynth, Bass Big Muff, TC Electronic Shaker
AMPS Ampeg SVT head and 8x10 cab

TOM REYNOLDS WITCHINGSEASON

If you want to be Victor Wooten then I say practise a lot, but playing in a band is a different ball game. I'm not saying practice doesn't help – that would be stupid – but as the bassist, gauge the feel of the band and how the music wants to move, play what fits and works. The music should be bigger than any individual. My first bass was some Yamaha: later I got an Epiphone Thunderbird. My favourite has to be a USP-Bass: it was a 1958 I believe. It was resprayed black in the 70s, but was worn with the original sunburst underneath. My bass heroes are Ben Shepherd (I wish I was him), Dave Alexander, Jeff Ament, Mike Watt and John Entwistle – and don't forget Flea. Got to give some love to him: I think bassists from my generation would agree. 'By The Way' made me ask for a bass for Christmas! If I could get the bass tone of any album ever released, I would choose *Post Pop Depression* by Iggy Pop – I think I've listened to that album non-stop since it was released. We're just building up to the release of our EP, *Celosia*.

www.facebook.com/witchingseason

GEAR
BASSES Schecter Hellraiser Extreme
EFFECTS Dunlop 1050 Crybaby Bass Wah
AMPS Kemper Profiler

TRAVIS JOHNSON IN THIS MOMENT

More often than not, I tend to follow the guitars, but I still lock in with the drums on key parts. Since we're a heavy rock band, I like to keep it simple and driving. I'm currently endorsed by Schecter guitars and Dunlop strings and pedals. Although I do own a few five-string basses, I strictly play four-strings live. I play with my fingers, so by having that little bit of extra space between the strings, I can really hammer down and play with more dynamics and attack. The secret of playing bass well is to know the true purpose of bass in a band, and to practise as much as possible. A bass player bridges the gap between the guitar riffs and the drum beat. The bass-line in a song is the glue that holds it all together and really drives the song home. With that power comes great responsibility, so if a bass player is sloppy or off their game, it can throw the whole band off, making everything sound like crap. Only practice can hone those skills. My favourite bass, hands down, is my Schecter Hellraiser Extreme. It has amazing tone, and is extremely easy and comfortable to play. I named that bad boy Clubber Lang because it's a tough, badass beast just like Mr. T in *Rocky III*! I have around 12 basses but Clubber is the first one I reach for every time. Without a doubt, my bass heroes are Cliff Burton (Metallica), Steve Harris (Iron Maiden) and Geddy Lee (Rush). Those three guys shaped me as a player from the moment I picked up my first bass. I studied them religiously and they proved that bass could and should be at the forefront of any great band. The greatest bass player that ever lived has to be Cliff Burton. He was a true innovator and was way ahead of his time. The first time I heard 'Anesthesia (Pulling Teeth)' I felt it in my soul. I had never heard bass like that before, and from that moment on, I was a bass player. Cliff set a standard which I think all bass players should strive to reach. It's a lofty goal, but he truly was amazing. If he were alive today I can't even imagine what he would be doing musically. Our sixth studio album, *Ritual*, is out now.

www.inthismomentofficial.com

IGB SERIES

Models shown: IGB RC BLSL, IGB STD MBK, IGB STD MRS, IGB LUX BK GL

TEL: 01483 238720 | EMAIL: SALES@ARIAUK.COM | WWW.ARIAUK.COM
Aria UK, Unit 1 Silverdale Road, Craufurd Business Park, Hayes, Middlesex UB 3BN

GEAR
BASSES Warwick Streamer Stage II, Stage I and Thumb, Music Man Stingray, Mayones
EFFECTS MXR M80, EBS Multicomp, Fulltone Bassdrive, Sansamp Bass Driver DI, Electro-Harmonix POG 2, Germanium 4, Big Muff
AMPS Gallien-Krueger 1001 RBII, SWR Goliath III, SWR Big Ben

KIYOSHI MANII MARTY FRIEDMAN

For me, it's easier to play a five-string bass than a four-string. I play heavy music, so I need low notes. The range of the melody is also expanded, although six strings are too many for me. Slapping is a natural thing for me. I often make songs from slap riffs. Many people say that they can't hear bass in music, but I think slap sounds are very easy to hear. My first bass was a four-string, but I was more interested in building my own bass than playing it. I studied musical instrument production and worked as a luthier for a while. My favourite bass ever to date is my 2001 Warwick Streamer Stage II five-string. It's like a part of my body because I've played it for so long. Last year, I signed an endorsement contract with Warwick: now they're making my original bass at their factory in Germany. The greatest bass player that ever lived is Les Claypool – he is my god! Because I admired him, I built a fretless six-string bass myself, although I can't play it as well as he does... My first solo album, *Kiyoshi*, was released last year on iTunes. No guitars were used in the making of this record. Only drums, my bass, and my vocal.

www.kiyoshi1031.com

GEAR
BASSES Squier, Anaconda Ultra J, Sire Jazz, Fender Marcus Miller signature
EFFECTS Boss Bass Driver, Zoom B3
AMPS Markbass Little Mark III, various Markbass cabs

SAMER AL-SHARAWI ELLE EXXE, STEALTH, JJ ROSA

I have a very soulful bass style that draws a lot of influence from blues, jazz and soul, but I end up playing a lot of rock and pop. I try and sneak in a jazz lick when possible instead of a pentatonic riff. I endorse Markbass amps, which in my opinion are the most truthful and uncoloured amps: I love them to bits. I also endorse DR Strings: I use Sunbeams on my bright-sounding basses and Fatbeams on my duller bass to even out the sound of the instruments. Finally, I also endorse Anaconda basses, Korg – who help out with equipment when I'm DJ-ing for artists – and Roland, who helped me out with a System-1 bass synth. I play slap bass, because you never know when someone is going to ask you to pull out the funk for a few bars. The key is to use it sparingly or with good control, so it's not overpowering – unless it's a solo. To me, the secret of playing bass well is listening to the other musicians around you and being sensitive to what they are playing. My favourite bass is a hot-rodded Squier Jazz five-string with handwound Lindy Fralin pickups and Hipshot hardware. It has the ability to sound like Jaco's Jazz on the bridge pickup or Pino's P-Bass when dialled to the neck. I would love to know how to get Marcus Miller's sound on *Renaissance*: just his sound in general is interesting. It's not a very useful sound for what I do, but I would love to know his secrets on compression and EQ. With Elle Exxe I've just got back from SXSW in Austin and we'll be playing festivals. You can also catch me at Glastonbury with The Dhol Foundation and I'll be doing some tours in Switzerland with JJ Rosa.

www.ss-bass.com

© Chris Cohen Photography

BASSES Homemade Fender copy
EFFECTS Electro Harmonix Big Muff
AMPS Vase Dynabass 1K classic with matching white 4x10 cab

KAT ADÉS
OTHER ANIMALS

My bass style is something like if Paul McCartney and James Jamerson had a really, really lazy bass-playing child who learned bass from Carol Kaye's secretary. The secret of playing bass well is to not be heard when you're there, but be missed when you're not. My first bass was my Dad's vintage Warwick. It was the heaviest thing in the world but the bruises were all worth it. My bass heroes are James Rust, Meshell Ndegeocello, Carol Kaye, Pino Palladino, Victor Wooten, Divinity Roxx and Esperanza Spalding. If I could get the bass tone of any album ever released, I would choose Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*. We're on tour through the UK and Europe promoting our upcoming debut album *Grand Departure*, set to drop in September.

www.otheranimals.net

GEAR

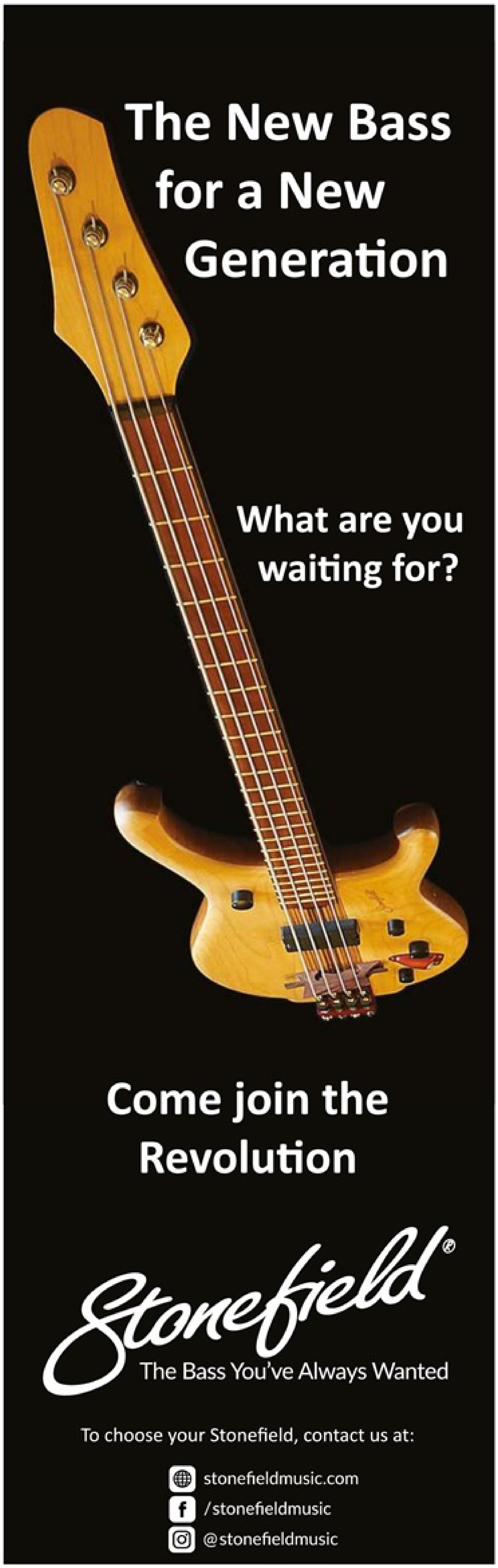
BASSES Fender Jazz USA, Aria Pro II
EFFECTS Electro Harmonix Big Muff, Bassballs, Nano Pog
AMPS Fender Rumble 100, Marshall VS100

GAZ BUTTERY GOSFORD COMPOUND

I lock in with the drums Adam Clayton style, although the music we play in Gosford Compound has a certain John Entwistle growl! I stick with four strings: I have no issues with more, but I once owned a Yamaha five-string and never really touched the low B. It was just surplus to requirements for me. If I could pick the perfect tone it would be Mike Kerr's from Royal Blood: he has awesome power that hits you in the chest live. I've seen them twice now and both times they just rocked. I discovered the secret to playing bass well at the London Bass Guitar Show at Olympia when Jah Wobble was on stage. He didn't have the fast chops of the other players there, but he grooved so hard that it hypnotised you: he just hooked you and carried you away with the song. My first ever bass was an Aria Pro II budget model: I still have it although it has a John East preamp in it now which makes it roar. My best bass to date is by far my USA Fender Jazz: again I have the LBGS to thank for it. Pre-owned at £600, it was already a bargain, but while I was busy watching the awesome TM Stevens, some kid had beat the guy down to £550. While the kid tried to get another fiver off, I whipped out my card – it really did feel like stealing, because it plays and sounds like a dream. In Gosford Compound I split my signal at the tuner: half goes through my Big Muff and into my bass-heavy EQ on my Fender amp, the other goes through my Nano Pog where it's octaved up and run through a overdriven channel on my Marshall guitar amp. This gives us a unique sound as we're a three-piece rock band. We have a six-track EP called *Vulcanised* available for download at all the usual places.

> "IF I COULD PICK THE PERFECT TONE IT WOULD BE MIKE KERR'S FROM ROYAL BLOOD: HE HAS AWESOME POWER THAT HITS YOU IN THE CHEST LIVE"

www.facebook.com/gosfordcompound



PLAYERS SCHOOL

A renowned multi-instrumentalist's view of the bass, courtesy of the Players School in Florida. This month: Elias Tona of Al Di Meola fame

Elias Tona (right) has played with Al Di Meola

In my list of favourite bass players of all time, I include not only those who have been great as a soloist, not a common virtue among bass players, but also those who have accomplished the role of an accompanist – like Jaco Pastorius with Weather Report, John Patitucci with Chick Corea, or Anthony Jackson with Michel Camilo. They all have had an artist to follow, and a driving compass for directions. All these great bassists get into their leader's musical brain to the point that they sometimes anticipate what the soloist's next move is.

I want to mention three strong characteristics of these great bass players. First, they all have a compositional mindset. While working with Al Di Meola I've been aware of how important it is to have this type of connection. All great solo artists, regardless of their instrument, move through solid structures, defined sections, and clear concepts of how they want their music to be orchestrated. In my case, Al pays attention to every note I play, as well as to the way I phrase a bass-line, so all my lines are played with full understanding of what his composition demands, based on the specific notes and also on the different rhythmic, melodic and harmonic shapes of my role. In the composing process, great bassists also take care of their sound, and the voice of their instrument. A master bass player once told me, "If you play softer and get more sound from the amp, you will sound better" – and from there my sound improved exponentially. Having the right gear and instruments helps, but all of that will be useless without having a voice. It's not only about the physical approach of the way I press a string down: it also has to do with phrasing, time-feel and dynamic control. Lastly, they all bring their whole energy to each and every performance, whether it's a public performance or a birthday party: they never lower their level of intention to make good music. They all seem to love sharing their musical treasures with everybody around them, and they all become good givers when it's time to play meaningful music. At the end of the process, we all play music from the inside out.

....with Chick Corea

....and last, but never least, Victor Wooten

http://playerschool.edu
Contact: Vicky Fulop Berlin, vfberlin@playerschool.edu

TRACE ELLIOT® ELF™

THE MOST PORTABLE, GIG-READY AMPLIFIER EVER MADE

730GRAMS - 17CM WIDE - 200W (4OHMS) - UK & USA DESIGN - XLR OUTS

AVAILABLE FROM AUGUST 2017

PRE-ORDER NOW FOR £295*

TRACE ELLIOT

Weighing just 0.73kg, this revolutionary amp is small enough to fit in your back pocket. It's an ideal solution for any bassist who is concerned with size and weight, but isn't willing to compromise on tone or performance.

Trace Elliot 1x10 and 2x8 lightweight enclosures also available. Equipped with Neodynium Speakers, and a specially designed ELF cradle.

BARNES & MULLINS

Multiple Winner of The UK's 'Best Supplier' Award

Available from all good music stores.

*Anticipated Recommended Retail Price. Subject to change

GEAR OF THE MONTH

In which three renowned gear experts nominate their bass, amp and effects unit of the month. Whether new or old, cheap or pricey, simple or complex, this gear has earned its place in our affections through simply being brilliant...

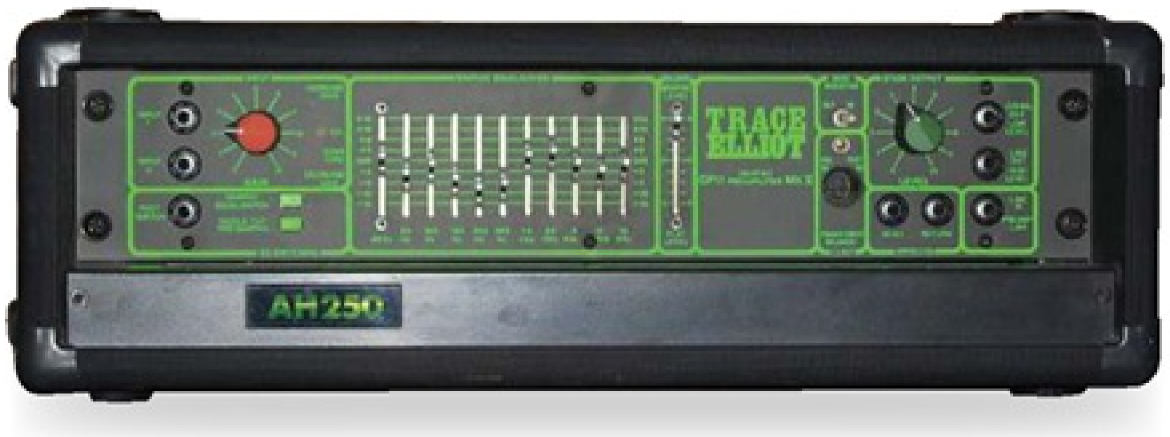
BASS

Player requests for a more 'back-friendly' lightweight bass in the late 80s led Fender to produce the Precision Lyte, along with an array of other models, that incorporated contemporary design visuals, active circuitry and new bridge designs. The P-Lyte, with its basswood body and reduced body and headstock dimensions, weighed in at around seven pounds, or just over three kilos in new money, making them perfect for anyone suffering with back, shoulder or neck pain. Despite its 34" scale, the bass feels smaller and more compact, making it a less daunting prospect for some players. Gold-plated hardware, a graphite nut and a control set comprising master volume, pickup pan and active bass and treble controls meant that it was a break from your typical Fender bass, although the Fender Power Jazz and Jazz Special were already on the market and the Kubicki licence would lead to several other deviations from the tried and trusted Fender formula. P-Lyte reviews first appeared in the UK around 1989: this Black Sparkle example (other original colours included Ivory White, Candy Apple Red and Honey Sunburst) was purchased new in April 1990, although the pickups have been swapped for Seymour Duncan Active EQ units.

Mike Brooks

AMP

In the early 80s, accompanied by an eerie green glow and gasps of "I want one" from hordes of British bass players, Essex-based Trace Elliot introduced the AH250 amp. With perfect synchronicity it arrived at precisely the same time as a renewed enthusiasm for post-punk and synth-pop funk. Level 42 were huge, and all of a sudden every bass player wanted to be Mark King. They dropped their Precisions, I-IV-V shuffles and 15" speakers and picked up hi-tech British custom basses like those made by Status, Wal and JD. We all wanted a bright, powerful sound and a smiley-face graphic EQ. With the AH250, TE designer Stuart Watson pioneered the use of MOSFET output stages, creating an amp capable of driving large cabinets including their own 4x10 cabs – another Trace first. Even more revolutionary was the GP11 preamp front end, which introduced us to sophisticated bass-specific graphic EQs, XLR output sockets, effects loops, LED level indicators and DI outputs, along with the company's iconic pre-shape EQ pre-sets. The AH250 had it all – and many of its features have since become industry standard. A great amp and a milestone in bass history.



Kev Sanders

FX UNIT

Compressors are strange beasts, inspiring the old saying that if you can hear what it's doing, it's doing too much. As a general rule, a compressor takes an already cool sound and smooths the rough edges off, meaning that everything is a little more consistent. With those rogue peaks tamed a little, it's possible to bring the overall level up, but there's a lot more that a good compressor can do, and a heck of a lot of noise that can be introduced into your signal chain by choosing a bad one, so we've got room to be fussy. Enter the Aguilar TLC, which gives you all the control of a studio compressor, but in a pedal. As well as the subtle smoothing qualities we generally need, it can also handle a much more pronounced squashing effect to make your slap sounds jump out, especially if you turn the attack up a little and leave a spike on the very front end of the note. Alternatively, it can add crazy amounts of sustain to a massively distorted sound. It's definitely at the clean end of the compressor pedal spectrum, and 99 per cent of the time, that's a vital quality in a pedal. Well worth looking for a little squeeze with your TLC...

"IT CAN ADD CRAZY AMOUNTS OF SUSTAIN TO A MASSIVELY DISTORTED SOUND"

Steve Lawson

THE LUTHIER

Raise a glass to ace luthier Douglas Mullen of Eve Guitars as he reaches the end of his amazing column series on the art of bass-building. Splendid work, that man!

And here we are – the finish line! It's been quite a journey over the last 16 issues, and I hope you've gained some insight into the theory, development and production of a bass guitar. The very last stage is putting all the elements together and completing the instrument. This is always rewarding – and as long as you've carefully considered all aspects of the build, the last stage should be relatively painless... in theory!

I usually dedicate an afternoon to finishing a bass. At this final stage, there may be slight adjustments required, so patience and focus are necessary. Although all the hardware was measured in the planning stage and the correct screws and tools are to hand, there are always tweaks that need to be addressed before shipping the bass to the customer.

Here's one of the major advantages of running a small luthiery business: you'll generally find that large manufacturers quickly assemble their instruments on the shop floor in large batches, which means that the attention paid to individual instruments is necessarily limited. This is why 'off the peg' basses require a setup after purchase. At Eve, however, every instrument is different, and each one has quirks which are only discovered in assembly.

Before pickups or any electronic components are added, I strongly suggest proper shielding to avoid unwanted noise. Passive pickups have higher output so that the analogue signal can travel to the amp, as opposed to active pickups which have a lower output but are boosted by a 9V battery and whose signal is processed by a preamp. In either case, I recommend proper copper insulation, grounded to the bridge. Most modern bass pickups are epoxy potted – in other words, sealed in resin – so the need to shield the pickup cavities is reduced, but I coat said cavities with graphite paint just to be on the safe side.

Note that no method is 100 per cent effective, so expect at least some noise from the instrument. After all, good quality pickups tend to be sensitive, and if you're around anything electrical – virtually anywhere, in other words – accept that some noise is inevitable. All you can do is try to reduce it as much as possible with the methods described above.

Once the tuning heads are attached, the nut is in place and the strings are on the bass, are we ready to go? Well, not quite... a good setup is underestimated, and can make a world of difference.

When a newly-made instrument is strung for the first time, it's the first time that the neck has been put under tension. As a result, it will move. This is why I tend to make the initial adjustments and then let the instrument settle for a week or so in a stable environment with no extremes of temperature. This is the perfect opportunity to wire and test all the electronics while the bass gets used to string tension.

There you have it, from first concept to the finished article – you now know many of the intricacies of bass luthiery! All that's left to say is a goodbye from me, and to pass on the feedback from this instrument's new owner, Ariel Bautista: "My new Iona Elite is stunning, right out of the box. The zebrano, mahogany and wenge wood combination, coupled with top-notch skill evident in the build, is amazing. It balances well, plays superbly, and is undoubtedly a diverse tone machine. The personal icon laser-etched into it makes it an absolute keeper for me, to be passed down to my son when I stop playing. My Iona will take a little bit of my soul well into the future. Thanks, Douglas!"

info@evebass.com

rockschool

APPLIED IMPROVISATION WITH ROCKSCHOOL

May the fourth be with you, says Rockschool's Joe Hubbard

The interval of a perfect fourth is powerful. After all, the bass guitar is tuned in perfect fourths E, A, D and G, so these intervals should be familiar to most of us. However, many bass players have trouble incorporating fourths into their playing on two distinct levels – sound and fingering difficulty.

On a sound level, most chords are tertian, which means built in thirds. In popular music, triads are tertian structures, but there are many examples in jazz where triads and four-part chords are built in fourths – most notably 'So What' by Miles Davis.

Now, quartal harmony – in other words, based on fourths – can be applied to any mode or scale. If we take the Dorian mode, for example, diatonic triads in fourths would consist of R (meaning root)/4/b7, 2/5/R, b3/6/9, 4/b7/b3, 5/R/4, 6/2/5, b7/b3/6. The outcome of this produces some very modern-sounding melodies which serve to break up the monotony of lines built in thirds.

A great example of lines in fourths is Eddie Harris' 'Freedom Jazz Dance': they're also often heard in the compositions of Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock and Joe Zawinul of Weather Report.

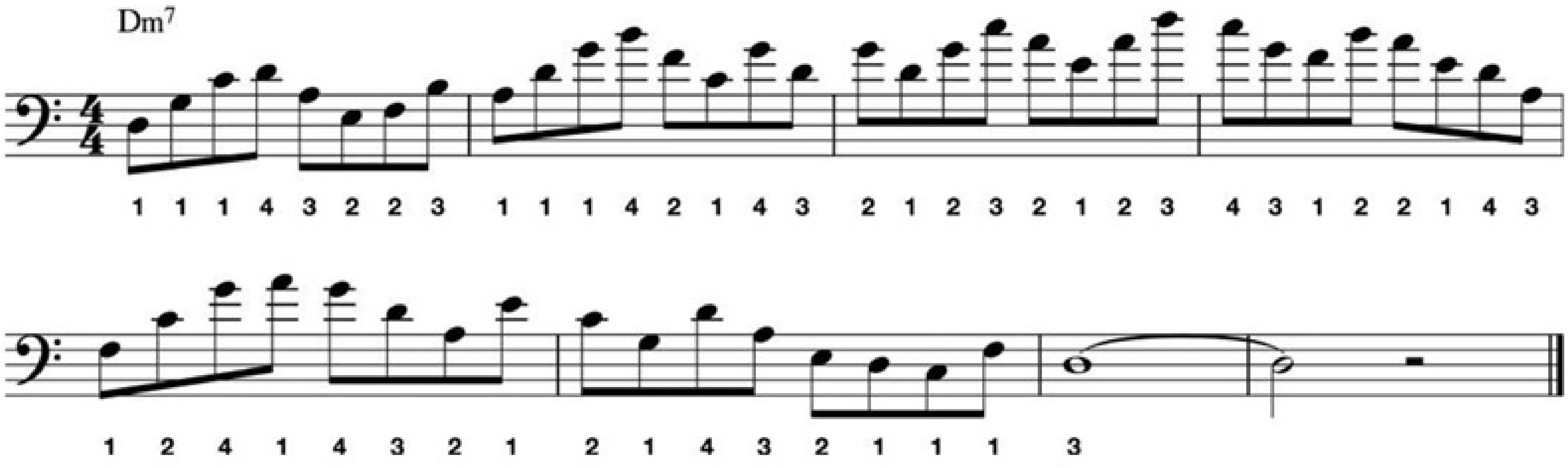
The fingering difficulty lies in the three main choices that are available to execute fourths. Those include barring, single finger execution and split-finger execution.

Try practising a tune such as 'Freedom Jazz Dance', as well as the etude in the example given. Here, my etude is based on the D Dorian mode, voiced in fourths. This includes triadic shapes, along with intervallic sequencing in fourths. In bars four and five I've used some fifths, but remember, fifths are inversions of fourths. This works nicely over a Dmin7 chord and will give you a modern twist in your lines.

Follow the fingerings as they're written, and remember to enjoy the process! Until next time...

> "BASSLINES IN FOURTHS ARE OFTEN HEARD IN THE COMPOSITIONS OF WAYNE SHORTER, HERBIE HANCOCK AND JOE ZAWINUL OF WEATHER REPORT"

EXAMPLE 1



1st name bassists...

... are on a first name basis with Radial!

Try out a JDI™, JDV™, Firefly™ or Tonebone® Bassbone™ and find out what these premier bassists are all raving about!

TONEBONE®

Radial® engineering

...PowerTools for power players™

tonebone.com
radialeng.com

Copyright©2017 Radial Engineering Ltd. all rights reserved.
Specifications and appearance subject to change without notice.

1588 Kebet Way, Port Coquitlam BC V3C 5M5
tel: 604-942-1001 email: info@radialeng.com

NO TREBLE

Kevin Johnson of No Treble ponders the ultimate Fender

While every bass has its own character and personality, there are a handful of instruments that seem to possess secret powers. These mythical beasts are the Excalibur or Mjölnir for us bassists. That's why the internet was ablaze when a bass belonging to Motown genius James Jamerson was put up for auction.

While it wasn't the legend's famously stolen 'Funk Machine' which he used to record numerous hits, the axe is a 1961 Fender Precision that he owned from 1962 until around '67 or '68, when he gave it to fellow Detroit bass player Billy Hayes. "Somewhere around 1967 or 1968, I don't recall specifically, I had a gig but no instrument," explained Hayes on the Heritage Auctions website. "Occasionally, I found myself in that situation. I mentioned it to James and he offered to help. He said he had a bass I could borrow. It was a 1961 Fender Precision with a sunburst finish. He never asked for it back, and I continued to use it for years with his blessing. James and his family left Detroit for California when Motown Records moved to Los Angeles, and we never saw each other again."

The kicker? Hayes left the bass completely original and only ever replaced the G-string, meaning the bass is still strung with three La Bella flatwounds used by Jamerson himself.

Most people were in awe of the relic, but for many on No Treble it just raised questions. Did Hayes have the right to sell it? Should it be returned to the Jamerson family? Would it be put in a museum and never played again? While the comments section on No Treble was going back and forth on the details, reader Chad Smith weighed in with some wisdom. "The bass instrument wasn't the magic... it was James."

In any case, the bass was auctioned off on June 19 with hundreds of bids cast. Many were wishful thinking between $500 and $1,000, with one person even throwing a Hail Mary of $31. Ultimately, the bass sold for $68,750 [£54,000]. That may seem steep, but one reader put it into perspective.

"Unfortunately [Jamerson is] not as well known as, say, Hendrix or Clapton to the general public, thus the sale price I suspect," he opined. "I would think $150,000 would be its true worth. Just hope the new owner shows the bass and maybe even plays it sometimes or loans it to a prominent session guy so we all can hear the bass."

Luckily for the new owner, the price included a case and strap.

www.notreble.com

BASSCHAT

Silvia Bluejay of Basschat braves the non-bass zone!

We have previously noted that many Basschatters play not just bass, but also at least another instrument, and sometimes more than one – although, regretfully, not all at the same time. We have a specially dedicated subforum, Other Instruments, in the Gear section, for those of us who feel like chatting about their other musical loves or asking for advice, or indeed who are simply curious to find out if anyone else shares their passion for a less popular instrument.

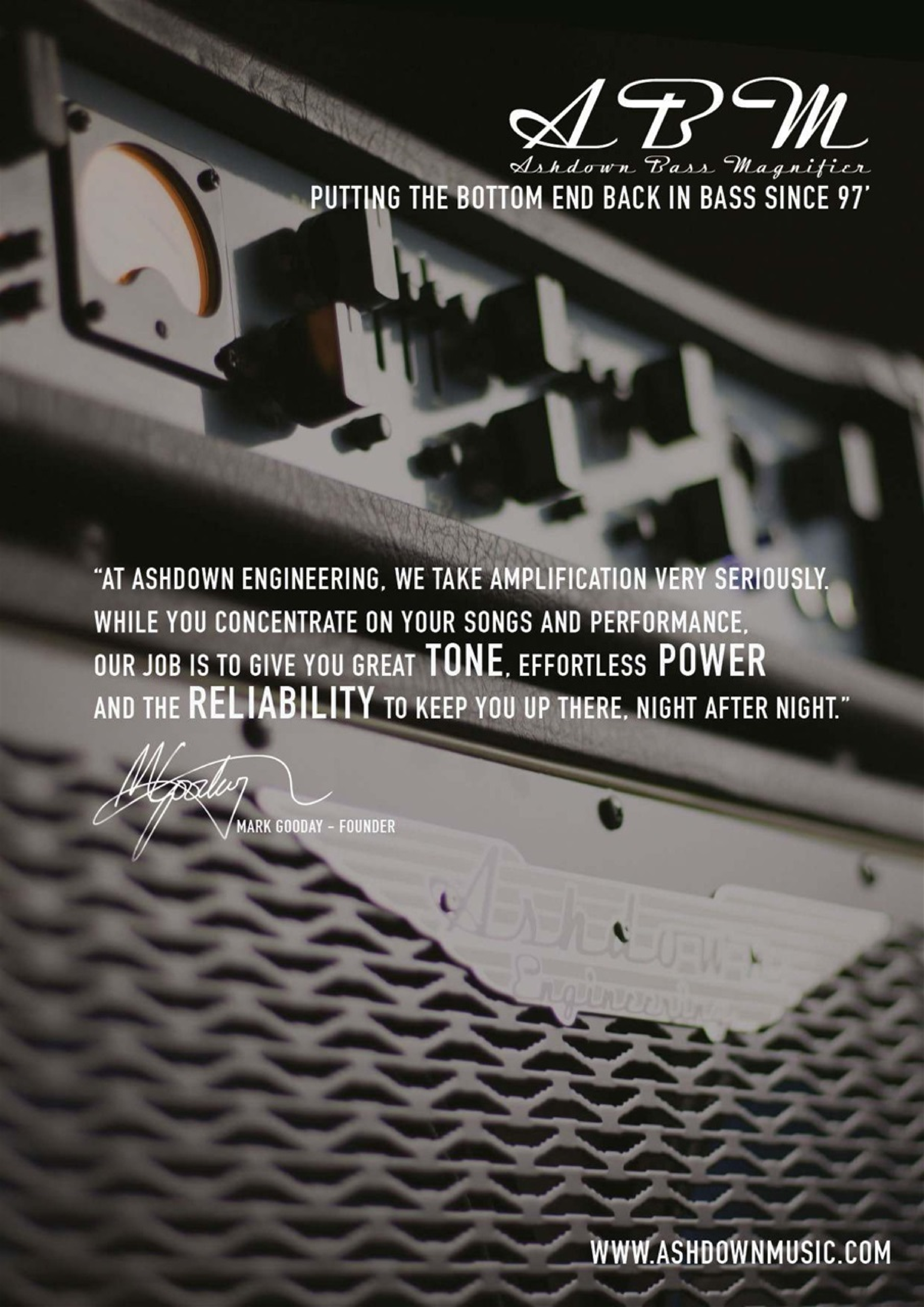
That's right – we're not just talking about bassists who also play guitar, keyboards or piano, or even drums, although there are plenty of them around. Nor are we necessarily talking about synth-bass, drum machines or other electronickery either, although again, synth appears frequently enough as a topic in that subforum. And although the band's PA system is frequently mentioned too, strictly speaking that's not really an instrument, is it? But there are threads in Other Instruments which are unusual, fun and informative, again revealing Basschat's vast collective knowledge and sense of humour, which never fails to create amusing banter and raise a smile.

One poster enthuses about getting himself a trombone, and receives both encouragement to start learning immediately, and advice to forget about it and put it in the metal recycling bin straight away. Another poster is looking for a set of bagpipes to look cool with on stage for the intro to a certain song, but he is not concerned with the actual sound produced, especially as he has no idea how to play them and no intention to learn properly. Cue a few rather outlandish suggestions – try a harmonica or a synth plus some effects instead? – and much mention of kilt-wearing and the sound of cats being strangled. More recently, we have had threads about antique violin, cajon, mandolin and bass ukulele, which can be a surprisingly adequate replacement for the sound of a double bass; its soft, fat strings, though, are an acquired taste.

Those of us who feel we struggle even just with the bass guitar need not be put off, however: the main theme in the Other Instruments forum is not boasting about how talented and versatile we are, but often surprise at finding other instruments so hard to learn, let alone master. Requests for advice and notes-comparing (npi) are frequent. There is even a thread titled Instruments You Struggle With, where the original poster wonders why he can't make sense of the violin despite playing several other instruments proficiently. The replies reveal that, collectively, we struggle with a variety of musical instruments ranging from harmonica (the diatonic type can only play the notes in one scale, so how difficult can it be? Very!) to vocals.

While it's possible to take lessons and learn to sing, we can only work with the voice that Nature has given us, which in many cases we find frustratingly inadequate. We also appear to have difficulty with brass: producing a sound, any sound, on the saxophone or the trumpet, for instance, is in itself a challenge, even before we get to grips with the fact that they are transposing instruments, but not like the bass. Speaking of which, five-string bass guitar and upright/double bass are duly namechecked in that thread – some of us definitely prefer their band's low end to be guitar-shaped and with no more than four strings.

www.basschat.co.uk


ABM
Ashdown Bass Magnifier
PUTTING THE BOTTOM END BACK IN BASS SINCE 97'
"AT ASHDOWN ENGINEERING, WE TAKE AMPLIFICATION VERY SERIOUSLY.
WHILE YOU CONCENTRATE ON YOUR SONGS AND PERFORMANCE,
OUR JOB IS TO GIVE YOU GREAT TONE, EFFORTLESS POWER
AND THE RELIABILITY TO KEEP YOU UP THERE, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT."
MARK GOODAY - FOUNDER
WWW.ASHDOWNMUSIC.COM

Fender

BLOOD OATH

Royal Blood are the coolest band in Britain — and unlike previous holders of that title, they do it all with bass and drums. Frontman Mike Kerr tells Joel McIver the unlikely story of his rise to glory with four strings, two amps and a mysterious signal chain

Pics: Adam Gasson

"As soon as our first record came out, it went mental," exhales Mike Kerr in evident disbelief, when we ask him if he can pinpoint the moment when Royal Blood's sudden ascent to the public eye began. We're in the catering area at Newcastle's O2 Academy and he's chowing down on a bowl of curious green soup, but even though he's focused on the task of getting his lunch down, he's clearly still blown away by how fast his band have risen up the ranks.

As well he might be. Royal Blood, a duo formed by Kerr and drummer Ben Thatcher in Brighton just four years ago, released their debut, self-titled album a year later. The rock world reacted with massive enthusiasm to the band's combination of catchy choruses, Led Zeppelin-style riffs and keen songwriting dynamics. A slew of industry awards and festival appearances followed, plus innumerable magazine covers, and by the time Royal Blood's new album *How Did We Get So Dark?* was released last month, Kerr and Thatcher had built a rabid international following.

That said, you'd never know Kerr was the hottest rock star this country has seen in years from our conversation backstage in the Toon. Slurping down his soup and suggesting that we find a quieter spot for our interview, he seems preternaturally relaxed, ready for any question we might throw at him. That includes the $64,000 inquiry about the contents of his pedalboard, a long-time secret that every bass and guitar hack in the Western world has tried to prise out of him over the last few years. Since we're here, we might as well have a crack at it too – but first, let's find out what it's like to live on Planet Royal Blood...

"At the time we came out, we were probably the only rock band that were writing pop tunes"

How come your band has got so huge in such a short time, Mike?
I honestly don't know. Outsiders have theories about it. At the time we came out, we were probably the only rock band that were writing pop tunes. Maybe people were psyched that there were two of us, I don't know... It's hard to tell, really. It's a mixture of being ready for it and being in the right place at the right time.

It must be something to do with the songs being good.
I think the songwriting is what we value the most, really. That's the most important thing to us.

How did the idea of a bass and drum duo, with the bass also playing the guitar parts, come about?
I started playing bass because Ben had joined a punk band as a session drummer. They needed a bass player, and it was a bit of paid work, but I didn't play the bass at the time, so they sent me the songs, and they were beginners' kind of bass-lines. So I just picked a bass up. I was probably 21 at the time.

How old are you now?
I'm 26. I just made it up and blagged it. But before I played bass I used to play keyboards through loads of amps and pedals and made these mad keyboard sounds through all the equipment I had, so I just plugged a bass in and started messing around with that. And then suddenly I started making this really big sound with guitar amps and bass amps. That got me really excited about playing the bass. I didn't really have any intention of playing bass... I felt more like a guitarist. I've got this theory that all bass players want to be guitarists, really. Ha ha!

Where did the idea of splitting the signal into guitar and bass amps come from?
I've always had a fascination with using more than one amplifier. The first time I played keys in a band, I used to play the bass-lines, because we didn't have a bass player, and I got really into using two amps and realising what a big tone you could make. It was really powerful. Even just putting one amplifier at the other side of the room and switching between the two suddenly felt 3D, as if there was more than one person in the room. I've always done that, so when it came to the bass, I worked out that you could sound like three people just by turning an amplifier on and off.

So what came first, the sounds you could make with an instrument, or the choice of instrument itself?
I got excited about the sound first. That made me play in a certain way. I think if you plug a new pedal in, it makes you play differently. You play in a completely different style to how you would usually, because you're adapting to a sound. When a new sound comes out I play bass in a completely different way. It's the same when I want to write a new riff or a song idea: I pick up a new bass or plug into a different amp. It'll just make you do something unpredictable.

Did you play guitar before bass?
Well, there was always a guitar in the house and I could play a few chords here and there.

So, playing devil's advocate for a minute, why not play guitar instead of bass and create the bass parts with an octave pedal, like the White Stripes did?
I don't think it's achievable with a guitar. With all the two-pieces that are fronted by a guitar, I just felt that the bottom end wasn't as good, because it's harder to fabricate a bottom end than it is to fabricate a top end. With true sub bass, there's something real, and starting with the bass, I had that bit covered – and by the time I emulate the top end, fuzz it and put it through guitar amps, it sounds great.

You used to do all this with fairly affordable gear, correct?
People buy an amazing vintage guitar that costs loads of money, and they plug into an amazing amp with all these tubes, but if you've got a pedal that's designed to sound fucked up between them, then you don't need that stuff at either end. So I figured it didn't matter as much.

Are you happy to discuss your pedalboard, or is that still classified?
To be honest with you, it's got to the point where even I don't know what's going on any more! There's a few key things that I keep close to my chest, but the principle of the sound isn't really a secret any more. I use octave pedals and guitar amps. It's more like the routing of everything [which is secret] and a few things on the way that are sort of taking [the pedalboard] from being budget to gourmet, ha ha! There's a few things on the way that just make it tidier.

So are you going to tell us what's in there?
Not really, no, but everyone knows I use an Electro-Harmonix POG 2 and some pedals for pitch-bending. It's all about continually refining my sound. It's always evolving and hopefully progressing.

In what way?
I'd just say there's more sounds. I used to have one sound on the first album, whereas on this new album the whole rig has a new configuration on every song. It feels like a step forward.

You used Gretsch basses for ages, but you're now playing Fenders. Why the switch?
Originally I used short-scale Gretsch Junior Jets. That's how the Royal Blood sound started, on them. It's a really cheap bass, 300 quid new. Eventually I was approached by [Gretsch's owners] Fender, who realised that I was using all Fender amps and walking on stage with their Gretsch guitars. They were very nice: they said, 'Is there anything we can do?' and we got talking. They made me this *über*-Jaguar with a humbucker which I really like. They're just tiny, and they feel like a guitar. As soon as I played one of them I was like, 'There's no going back'.

Does it have the microswitches that the original Jaguars had?
No, it literally just has one pickup, tone and volume. Just one output. I also use Fender Starcasters for certain songs. We have a new tune in B standard, so I need a bass that's going to take that low tuning.

Do you play five-strings?
I've never gone there. We just tune down. There is one bass I have for the song 'Hook, Line And Sinker' that has two guitar strings and two bass strings on it, just to get more reach on the scale. I always think of it as if you were sat at a piano, bass is the lower two octaves and your right hand is two octaves up, and is more extreme.

What gauge are the guitar strings?
I've no idea. They're the top two strings of a guitar. It really screams. I'm not the first person to do that, but it's a cool little trick if you want to find something different and amuse yourself a bit by putting the wrong strings on.

You have a custom Manson bass too.
I do, but I don't use it. There was a song I was working on at the time, and I worked out that I needed to make a certain guitar sound using a bass with guitar strings, but I ended up not using the song. So I have this amazing bass for no reason! It's really, really good.

So is the Jaguar your go-to bass?
Yes. The whole of the new album was done on those, apart from one song. I had them in lots of different tunings. Well, they're all standard tunings, but I like to play open riffs,

Mike Kerr, Royal Blood

> "All of it is hard at first, but after a couple of shows it feels easier and easier"

so if I want to change the key of a song I just throw the whole thing down or up.

Presumably that makes singing across the riffs easier.

Yes, exactly. I think you've just got to do it really slowly and practise. All of it is hard at first, but after a couple of shows it feels easier and easier. I had to concentrate a lot on these new songs.

How many basses do you take on the road?

Seven, in different tunings from B to F.

What amps do you use?

They're all Fender: a Supersonic and a Bassman.

Do you take a spare pedalboard with you?

A few key spare pedals. Everything has a contingency plan. The way the pedalboard is set up now, it's a lot safer. If one pedal goes down, the whole thing doesn't go down, whereas before it was all one big chain.

The songs on *How Did We Get So Dark?* sound more complex than the older stuff.

Yeah, but also, the way I wrote this time was I wrote the bass-line and then I wrote the vocal part, so when we recorded the songs I'd never done them at the same time before. Suddenly I was like, 'Shit, how am I going to do that?' But it makes it interesting, and it means you're at the peak of your ability as well. Even *beyond* your ability. You don't even know if you can do it yet.

Is it stressful playing a tricky bass part and singing a part over it?

Not if I know it's possible. I'd stress out if I knew it was impossible, or if I was overdubbing things that I couldn't do.

PROMENADE MUSIC

01524 410 202
www.promenademusic.co.uk

4 String Basses

15278 - Bass Collection Jive Bass Black n Blocks
13994 - Bass Collection Portrait Fretless Bass
15510 - Bass Collection Rhythm Stick, Sunburst
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag

Cort

16156 - Cort Action PJ OPB, Open Pore Black
10111 - Cort GB74 4 String Bass in Natural
15242 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 5 String Bass

Fender

14643 - Fender Am Dlx Dimension Bass IV Cayenne
15830 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass, Sunburst
15951 - Fender American Pro P Bass Olympic White
15354 - Fender American Vintage '74 Jazz Bass, 3-Col
15536 - Fender Dlx Active Jazz Bass Surf Pearl
15529 - Fender Deluxe Dimension Bass IV, ACBurst
15533 - Fender Flea Jazz Bass, Shell Pink
15847 - Fender Mustang Bass PJ, Olympic White
15686 - Fender Mustang Bass PJ, Sonic Blue
16127 - Fender Precision Partscaster, Secondhand
8929 - Fender Roger Waters Precision Bass
16263 - Fender Standard P Bass, Brown Sunburst
15266 - G & L Tribute Series M2000, Sunburst
11069 - G&L Tribute L2000 4 String In Blueburst

Gibson

9207 - Gibson SG Bass Guitar Worn Ebony Faded

MUSIC MAN

16236 - MusicMan Caprice, Heritage Tobacco Burst
16149 - MusicMan Stingray 4 Bass with 3 EQ Black
15914 - Musicman Bongo 4, Metallic Blue
15941 - Musicman Cutlass Bass, Heritage TobBurst

ORANGE

15107 - Orange O Bass, Off-Black

Spector

11197 - Spector Bass Performer 4, Red
16270 - Spector Coda Pro 4 Natural Stain
14105 - Spector Legend Standard 4 Blue Stain
16175 - Squier Bronco Bass, Black
16151 - Squier Bronco Bass, Torino Red
15675 - Squier Vint Mod Jazz Bass 70s, CAR
16144 - Squier Jazz Bass Pack Black & Fender Amp
15890 - Tokai Jazz Sound Bass, Secondhand
14778 - Vintage ICON V74MR Fretless, Sunburst

WestCoast

6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red

YAMAHA

14836 - Yamaha 2024 Bass, Sunburst, Secondhand
5634 - Yamaha BB714BS Billy Sheehan, Lava Red
15998 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Bass, OVSunburst
15997 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Electric Bass
15996 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Bass, Black
13138 - Yamaha TRBX304 4 String Bass In White
15999 - Yamaha TRBX504 Bass, Trans White

5 String Basses

15983 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass V, Black
15731 - Cort A5 Ultra Artisan 5-String Bass, Blk
15363 - Cort A5 Ultra Artisan 5-String Bass, Nat
15725 - Cort Action DLX 5 FGB Faded Grey Burst
14312 - Cort Action V-DLX, Cherry Red Sunburst
16004 - Cort GB5 Custom Natural 5 String Bass
12538 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Open Pore Nat.

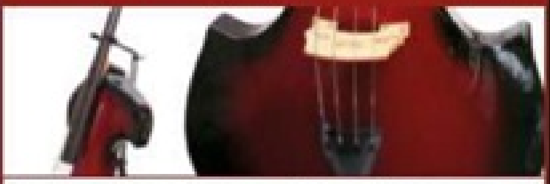
Fender

15844 - Fender 5-String Jazz Bass, Blue, Used
15530 - Fender Deluxe Active Jazz Bass V, Black
13117 - Fender Deluxe Dimension Bass V Natural
15265 - G&L Tribute L2500 5 String, Blueburst
16180 - Ibanez BTB5 Trans Black, Secondhand
15407 - Marleaux Contra 5, Old Violin Finish
10960 - Pedulla Rapture Fretted 5-String Bass
16120 - Shuker Horn Bass, Trans Turqoise, Used
15343 - Spector Bass Legend 5 Custom Bubinga
12406 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Amber
11195 - Spector SP5BK Performer 5 in Black
15797 - Squier Deluxe Dimension Bass V, Sunburst
13193 - Yamaha TRB1005J Bass, Black
13389 - Yamaha TRBX305 Bass, Candy Apple Red
16000 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Acoustic Basses

15234 - Fender Kingman Bass SCE with Case
10498 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, Black
15771 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, M/ogany
15117 - Takamine GB30CE ElectroAcoustic,Blck
14263 - Takamine GB72CE Jumbo Cutaway

Electric Upright Basses



4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
14482 - NS Design NXT Electric Double, Black
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass

Fretless Basses

13371 - Squier Vintage Modified Fretless Bass
5719 - Squier Vint Mod 4 Fretless Jazz
14778 - Vintage ICON V74MR Fretless, Sunburst

String Deals

2 Sets of Elite (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Elite (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £35 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £40 inc P&P

Bass Combos

13577 - AER Amp III Bass Amp Combo
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)

Ashdown

15190 - Ashdown AAA 30 8 30w 1 x 8" Combo
15187 - Ashdown AAA 300 210T 300w 2 x 10"
15189 - Ashdown AAA 60 10T 60w 1 x 10" Combo
6759 - Ashdown ABM C115 500 Evo 3 (575w)
15953 - Ashdown ABM410 Bass Combo, S/hand
8714 - Ashdown After Eight 20 Bass Combo
15192 - Ashdown B-Social Bass Amp with BT
8750 - Ashdown Perfect Ten Bass Combo
15182 - Ashdown RM C112T 500 EVO 500w 1x12
15180 - Ashdown RMC115T 500 500w 1x15 Bass
15181 - Ashdown RMC210T500 EVO 500w 2x10"
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp

EDEN

12431 - Eden EC210 2 x 10 Bass Amp Combo
13375 - Eden EC28 Bass Amp Combo
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
13704 - Eden EM275 Stereo Bass Amp Combo
16046 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo
16028 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo

Fender

12686 - Fender Bronco 40 Bass Amp
13497 - Fender Rumble 100 Bass Amp Combo
4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
12745 - Fender Rumble 200 Bass Combo
15113 - Fender Rumble 25 Bass Amp Combo
13083 - Fender Rumble 40 Bass Amp Combo
15114 - Fender Rumble 500 Bass Amp Combo

Hartke

14095 - Hartke HD150 Bass Combo
9279 - Hartke Kickback 15 Bass Amp Combo

Mark bass

9004 - Markbass 121 Lite Alain Caron Combo
6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P Bass Combo
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin (300W)
13279 - MarkBass Markacoustic AC601 Combo
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (300W,1x12)
5474 - Mark Bass Mini CMD151P (300W,1x15W)
5475 - Mark Bass CMD121H (300W, 1x12)
9940 - Markbass Mini CMD 151 Jeff Berlin
9938 - MicroMark 801 Bass Combo

ORANGE

15715 - Orange Crush Bass 100 Bass Amp
15716 - Orange Crush Bass 25 Bass Amp
15714 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Bass Amp
15111 - Orange OB1 300 Combo

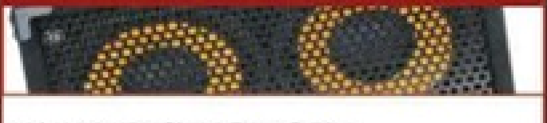
Roland

6320 - Roland CB100 (100W, 1x12)
4433 - Roland CB120XL Cube 120X (120w, 1x12)
4435 - Roland Cube 20XL BASS (20W, 1x8)
4434 - Roland Cube 60XL (60W, 1x10)
5678 - Roland Microcube Bass RX, (5W, 4x4)

Bass Heads

15176 - Ashdown ABM1200-EVO IV 1200w Head
14618 - Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 Bass Amp Head
16112 - Ampeg SVT350H Bass Amp Head, S-hand
15115 - ABM 600 EVO IV 600W Ashdown Bass Head
15177 - Ashdown ABM600RC EVO IV 600W Rack
15179 - Ashdown RM500 EVO 500w Rootmaster
14531 - Ashdown RM800 Rootmaster Bass Amp
14553 - Ashdown Retroglide 800 Compact Bass Head
13200 - Eden E300 Bass Amplifier
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
13198 - Eden WTX500 Bass Amp Head
16044 - Eich T1000 Bass Amp
16043 - Eich T300 Bass Amp
16027 - Eich T500 Bass Amp
16026 - Eich T900 Bass Amp
15484 - Fender Bass Man 800
9349 - Hartke HA2500 Bass Head
9027 - Hartke Kilo 1000 Bass Head
12382 - Hartke LH1000 Bass Head
15588 - Hartke TX600 Bass Amplifier
14828 - Mark Bass Nano Mark 300 Bass Amp Head
10408 - MarkBass Bass MultiAmp Stereo
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head 500w
9036 - Markbass Little Mark III Tube Bass Head
5244 - MarkBass Little Mark Tube 800, 800W
7962 - Markbass TTE500 Randy Jackson Bass Head
9941 - Markbass Little Mark 250 Head Black
15271 - Markbass Little Mark Ninja Bona Head
9944 - Markbass MultiAmp
15151 - Markbass Randy Jackson TTE501 Bass Head
9725 - Markbass TTE801 Randy Jackson Bass Head
15109 - Orange 4 Stroke 300 Bass Amp
15110 - Orange 4 Stroke 500 Bass Amp
6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head

Bass Cabinets



13640 - Aguilar SL112 Bass Cabinet
15191 - Ashdown AAA 115T 200w 1 x 15" Cabinet
5677 - Ashdown ABM810 (8x10)
6457 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15)
15766 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15) Used
15178 - Ashdown ABM210H EVO IV 300w 2 x 10"
15460 - Ashdown ABM210H NEO
6456 - Ashdown ABM410H (4x10)
6450 - Ashdown MAG410T Deep (4x10)
15185 - Ashdown RM210T EVO 300w 2 x 10" Cab
15183 - Ashdown RM 112T EVO 300w 1 x 12" Cab
15184 - Ashdown RM 115T EVO 300w 1 x 15" Cab
15186 - Ashdown RM 610T EVO 900w 6 x 10" Cab
14196 - Blackstar HT Metal 412A Extension Cab
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
13196 - Eden EX210 Bass Cab
16054 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16055 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16041 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohms
16042 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohms
16075 - Eich 115L Bass Cabinet
16052 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16053 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16039 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16040 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16071 - Eich 210M Bass Cabinet
16069 - Eich 212L Bass Cabinet
16070 - Eich 212M Bass Cabinet
16048 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16050 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16068 - Eich 410L Bass Cabinet
16067 - Eich 610L Bass Cabinet
16061 - Eich 612XL Bass Cab
16065 - Eich 810L Bass Cabinet
14254 - Hartke 210XL 2 x 10" Bass Cab
5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV102P (2x10)
16013 - Markbass 123 Alain Caron Bass Cab
16014 - Markbass CMD Super K1 Alain Caron
5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x 12 Bass Cab
10412 - Markbass NY122 2 x 12 Bass Cab
10409 - Markbass NY151 1 x 15 Bass Cab
10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
15272 - Markbass New York 122 Ninja Bona Cab
6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)

Fender

What's the toughest Royal Blood bass part?
There's one song on the new album that I've only just learned. It's taken three months. It's the end of the song 'How Did We Get So Dark?' It's like a Rubik's cube! I don't have a musical explanation for it, but it's a mantra lyric over a riff that's constantly evolving. I just go into a daze and do it.

Is there more pressure on stage because there's only you and a drummer there?
I guess so, yeah, but the rig sounds so good and so loud that I forget that there's only two of us. It's like being on your own in a sports car.

How do you connect with a big crowd from the stage?
I'm still working that out, but after watching the Foo Fighters play, I think it's about engaging with them in a way that makes it feel like a smaller room than it is. Sometimes you have to physically bridge the gap between the stage and the audience. But once the lights are on and the songs are going, it feels pretty good.

Which other bass players do you like?
There's Nick O'Malley of the Arctic Monkeys *[points at cover of BGM 107 in a pile of mags which I've brought along]*. I like his style of playing. I like bass players who go unnoticed: people who actually serve the song and don't feel the need to draw all the attention to themselves. When you tune in, you realise how smart all of their parts are, and how *musical* the parts are, rather than being showy. I like all the bass-lines in Queens Of The Stone Age's tunes too. They enhance the grooves and change the whole feel of the melodies. It's really smart bass playing.

Do you always play with a pick?
I played fingerstyle when I first started, but the nature of how I play is guitar, really, so I need that bite for that classic guitar feel.

Do you play slap bass?
No. I would like to be able to. It probably wouldn't have a place in our music, but I'd like to learn anyway. It looks fun.

What advice do you have for aspiring bassists?
Have fun. Nothing is important unless it's fun, and if it's fun, the rest will come naturally. Find a way of doing things that is enjoyable: there's no wrong way of doing anything. If anything, if you're doing something wrong, you're onto something. Also, it's important to listen to all types of music. It's the only way to be forward-thinking and corrupt your genre, and the only way to do that is to bring in elements of other genres and break some rules. Listening to hip-hop and R&B really affects the beats in a lot of our tunes more than people might realise.

Talking of which, you and Ben must have a pretty close musical bond, as a rhythm section that is also the whole band.
Where I would lay down a riff, any other drummer would come in with a classic rock beat, whereas Ben won't even play any cymbals – he'll go straight to the toms and keep it sparse with a big beat and a hip-hop beat. Removing cymbals makes things sound twice as heavy. We juxtapose against each other too, so if Ben's doing a really big rock beat, I think 'How do I fuck that up?' If I just rock out with the drums, everyone's heard that before.

How do you write new riffs?
I try not to look at the fretboard sometimes, because you know where everything is. You

"Have fun. Nothing is important unless it's fun, and if it's fun, the rest will come naturally"

know what it will sound like if you go to a certain place. That doesn't seem very creative. Sometimes I put all the strings out of tune, or I just try and write it all on one string. I always try to confuse myself a little bit, so I'll follow my ear rather than following what I know.

Do you write songs on the road?
I write a lot of my riffs when I'm drunk and I sing into my iPhone. The next day I'll sift through the ideas and when you translate them, they're great. If you think of a riff, it's usually cooler than if you sit and write one.

What defines a good riff?
To me, it's more impressive to write something which people wish they wrote and which is easy, rather than something that they'll never be able to play because it's too hard. Like 'Seven Nation Army' by the White Stripes. That could literally be the first thing you might teach someone to play, yet it's one of the most iconic riffs of our generation. It's international and it's sung in stadiums all round the world. I'd rather write something like that than some progressive shred.

Is practice important for you?
I never sit down and practise, but I'm always playing, because I like it. I feel more comfortable holding a bass. It's like a dummy or something... but I never sit and do scales, or anything like that. I'm always looking for the next riff or the next song idea. Maybe I should learn more scales, I might get more ideas. But the whole idea is that I want to know less.

Does life on the road suit you?
We love it, and we enjoy it, but I won't see home now for two years. My family are happy that I have a proper job... well, not a proper job, but you know what I mean. Before that I worked in restaurant kitchens and Ben worked in bars. I always wanted to play music in front of people, but you don't really get to decide whether you're successful or not: that's something that happens to you.

Which brings us back to our first question: has there been a secret to Royal Blood's success?
No. When we started jamming together in 2013, if we'd wanted to be successful we wouldn't have formed a two-piece dirty rock'n'roll band, we would have tried to emulate someone who was experiencing success. We were just doing what we wanted to do.

Your life must be rather surreal.
Yeah, it's mad. Every morning, I walk into the venue and I think 'Why are people coming?'

How Did We Get So Dark? is out now on Warners. Royal Blood will be playing a UK arena tour in October and November. Info: www.royalbloodband.com.

TONE UP
see hear feel
3D
Precision Engineered
Stainless Steel Bass Bridge
Optimal tone, attack and sustain
3D adjustable saddle
Enclosed set screws
Offset intonation screws
Top loading
Stainless steel construction throughout
Curved base plate
Available only from
Tonetech Luthier Supplies
www.tonetech.co.uk
0161 406 0127
info@tonetech.co.uk
Tone Tech

Jeepers Creepers

From underdogs to pack leaders, Creeper are a force that cannot be ignored. Bassist Sean Scott and Hywel Davies talk punk... a lot of punk

"Music hasn't gone downhill, it just had to change. One of my favourite quotes is 'The worst thing about hardcore is hardcore; the worst thing about punk is punk'. It's like you're not hardcore or punk enough to hang with us and to be in the same scene, which is total bullshit," professes Creeper bassist Sean Scott.

Back in 2014, Creeper were still just another local band in their native Southampton. This six-piece [Will Gould, vocals; Ian Mile, guitar; Hannah Greenwood, keyboard and vocals; Scott, bass; Dan Bratton, drums; Oliver Burdett, guitar] have slogged through the music business and come out clean the other side. With their stellar debut album *Eternity In Your Arms* spreading through the UK underground like wildfire, Creeper are set to be the metal kids' next big thing.

When *BGM* gets chatting to Scott, the role of bass guitar in punk inevitably comes into conversation. Who were the players who inspired him to pick up the bass in the first place? "When I was younger, I was always interested in those bands who broke through to the mainstream market. For me it was Matt Freeman of Rancid, that guy's a machine. Chris Barker from Anti-Flag was always someone I respected too. In the punk world, bassists are often put to the side. Bass is supposedly only there to provide the rhythm and give that low-end bulk, so the cool thing about those guys was that they put in countermelodies within the songs that complemented the music. For me, it was those players that separated their bands from the rest. They made it so much more relatable for me, being a bassist."

A popular assumption when it comes to playing bass in a genre such as punk, is that it's simple music played with a pick. "The argument of pick versus fingers should come down to what suits the song best," says Scott. "As far as I'm concerned, I feel pick playing has to be respected on the same level as fingerstyle. Put it this way, when this genre started, these guys weren't technically minded, especially in that 80s American punk movement where the East and West coast bands just picked up their instruments and played harder and faster than anyone else. Everyone was just punching their guitars, and you can't have that aggressive state of mind if you're relaxed and playing with your fingers. It doesn't make sense for the genre."

On that note, what is the secret to high-speed picking, we ask? "Forearm strength is quite vital. I make a conscious effort to specifically spend some time working on getting my forearm and grip strength better. Richard Boucher from Funeral For A Friend got me thinking about this: he said, 'It's strength, mate. You got to really work on your strength.' Since then I've been working out my arms and I've gotten way more comfortable with my playing. I don't focus on hitting down much these days because I'm playing better and more naturally. It's one of those things that's frustrating, because I should have done it way before now. Life would have probably been a lot easier!"

For Scott, finding the right bass wasn't as easy as walking into a shop and picking up the first four-string that caught his eye. Taking the time, patience and research, what bass did he finally settle on, we wonder? "When Creeper started as six friends from the local punk scene who wanted to start a band, we really had to think about our tone and our sound. I invested that little bit more time in looking into my influences and what they were playing. Precision and Jazz basses come up a lot: they were the ones that a lot of people gravitated to. I almost went for the Dee Dee Ramone Precision, but I eventually bought an American Standard Precision instead. The tone sounded better for me because it has that spike, which gave me slightly more trebly bass-lines. It was just a case of combining that bass, the amp that I use and the minimal pedals that I have, and it happened to be the tone I had been looking for after so many years. It's a wonder that I hadn't done it before!"

Eternity In Your Arms **is out now via Roadrunner.**
Info: www.creepercult.com

BIG TIME

Pic by Eckie

The mighty Billy Sheehan returns with a new Mr Big album. Mike Brooks asks the big questions

If you keep up with Billy Sheehan on social media, you'll be aware that this is a man who rarely stands still. At 64, he puts a lot of younger musicians to shame – a seasoned globetrotter, bass-playing virtuoso, and a musician par excellence. No surprise, then, that he was only just able to fit us in for a catch-up prior to the launch of the new Mr Big album, *Defying Gravity*.

"We've just finished shooting videos for two songs, which was gruelling but a necessary evil," he tells *BGM*. "We gave ourselves six days in the studio to write and record the material: we worked a lot of it out on the spot which is cool. Pressure is a good motivator sometimes. Necessity is the mother of invention, so when you have six days and six flights booked for people to leave – so you can't do anything more – you turn the heat up and make it happen."

Defying Gravity is the band's ninth studio album and sees the original line-up reunited with Kevin Elson, the man behind the desk on the first four Mr Big albums. As well as sounding strong and melodically reminiscent of their 1991 album *Lean Into It*, the band sound like they had a lot of fun recording this current offering, a point Billy is quick to confirm. "I believe so: having Kevin was how the dam broke. He did all of the Journey stuff, he grew up with Lynyrd Skynyrd, and he was with them on the plane that crashed. He has incredible stories and a wonderful sense of music, and his mixes are as good as it gets. We really did have a riot, but we dug in deep and found a way to overcome obstacles by being creative."

He continues, "I've seen it many times. You have 30 days to make a record and $300,000, and I'll guarantee you that on day 29, it'll be just barely done but the whole budget will have been blown. On the other hand, if you give yourself two days to make a record and $600, you'll come home with the same thing. So why waste money and time?"

With only six days to pull everything together, and all hands to the pump, having four vocalists in the band was a big plus. "Eric [Martin, vocalist] stepped up to the plate and did his very best. We all sing and write lyrics, so we already have an idea of what is likely to fit – but when a singer sings, some lyrics don't fit. Just as when a composer writes for the viola, he needs to have a knowledge of what notes the viola has in terms of what works and what doesn't. We always have to rewrite to make things work, but with a singer like Eric, he automatically knows what will work or not – plus he can sing just about anything anyway. He's very clever in the way he phrases things."

Despite the technical aspects of his playing, Billy isn't afraid to put that side of things to one side, as he explains. "Solos and technical playing have their place. We've certainly utilised those, and will continue to do so – but most of the time you've got to put it away, because there's no need for histrionics or blazing technical wizardry. Sometimes it's just about us laying a groove down. It's sad that so many musicians get fixated on technical stuff. Hundreds of times, I've sent emails to people suggesting they learn some songs and play them out with a band in front of people. That'll teach you more than any Youtube videos you could ever imagine."

So let's cut to the quick. How did the young Billy Sheehan become the bass legend he now is? "In Talas we just got on stage and played and sang songs," he tells us. "We had no idea if we were doing it correctly, but we managed to blub our way through solos and technical parts – if there were any in those songs – and we managed to get by. We did 21 nights in a row, three complete shows in one day on one occasion, playing cover songs all over the place. It really is supremely important. Having whizzy chops turns people off, because it's musicians playing for musicians – and usually musicians get into the show for free. They usually stand there with their arms crossed saying 'I can do that'.

"I love my fellow musicians, but I think all musicians should band together and support each other, instead of trying to outdo each other. It's really about entertainment: the more people we can get into the rooms that we play in, the better everyone does.

"As a fan, I've listened to music that has lifted me, inspired me and educated me on music that was simply on a higher level of playing and art. Let's help each other out once in a while and move things forward: we're all in this together!"

Billy's gear rarely goes without a few tweaks and changes between *BGM* interviews. We've noticed that his amplification currently consists purely of 15" cabinets, for example. Why the change from 10" speakers? There are reasons, as Billy describes. "I went for the 15s from the very beginning, I had a Fender Bassman with two 15s and then I went to four 15s before switching to Ampeg with 8x10s. Then Ampeg went out of business – we're talking the mid-70s here – so I switched over to JBL enclosures. I love the purity of a single voice coil that you get with a single 15" speaker, and a wide speaker cone for smooth dispersal. The 15s seem to have a more classic sound. In fact, someone recently wrote to me and told me that they've found four of my old JBL cabinets, so I'm picking them up soon."

The second iteration of Billy's EBS distortion pedal has gone from strength to strength, something that he's suitably proud of. "I get email almost every day from someone who has bought the pedal and they're raving about it. It seems to work really well for a lot of people, I had a message today from a guy in Brazil who has scrapped a lot of gear and is able to just take that pedal with him to gigs – and he loves it. The real payoff for me is when it works for someone and helps to move them along in their musical endeavours: I'm always pleased to hear that."

The remainder of 2017 looks immensely busy for the lord of the low end. Tell us all, Billy... "Writing for the next Winery Dogs album starts at the end of this year. I'm always writing, so I've got a couple of things set aside for the next album. I would still love to work with the guys from the David Lee Roth band, I'm open to anything with Dave. He's still my hero: even just one gig would be a great thing. I get messages about it every day! But for now, Mr Big are about to hit the road with European and UK dates being added as we speak. Dates aren't announced until all the dates in an area are confirmed. I heard a rumour that we might even get to Australia this time. We never really have any control over where we play – for the most part no band does!"

"WE HAD NO IDEA IF WE WERE DOING IT CORRECTLY, BUT WE MANAGED TO BLUB OUR WAY THROUGH SOLOS AND TECHNICAL PARTS — IF THERE WERE ANY IN THOSE SONGS — AND WE MANAGED TO GET BY"

Defying Gravity **is out in July on Frontiers.**
Info: www.mrbigsite.com

Pic by Andrew Ogilvy

RIDE ON TIME

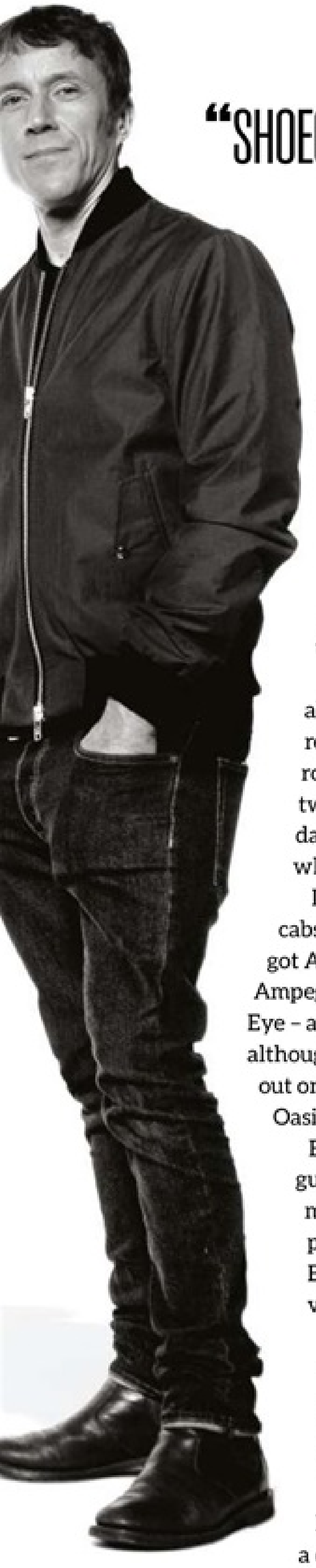
Shoegaze pioneers Ride return; and bassist Steve Queralt says headless basses are due to have a fashion moment…

On our new album, *Weather Diaries*, I used a small Ampeg Portaflex and a DI. I rely on the engineers to find the right frequency range for the bass. Each band-member in Ride likes to be heard: if we're going to play an instrument, it's got to fit in somehow. That's why quite a lot of the bass on the album has a lot of overdrive or distortion on it, to add some character. I don't like just playing along with the root note – I have to add something, or at least pretend to myself that I'm adding something, ha ha!

I used a four-string Steinberger bass for a lot of the recording – no-one must ever know that I used one (I'm joking). It's the full-body one, not the wedge-shaped one, so it's almost there, it just needs a headstock! The sound of it was brilliant. I bought it when we did our second album [*Going Blank Again*, 1992] and we were recording with Alan Moulder, who suggested I get one – we just laughed at the time. But he persuaded me eventually, and I've used it for recording ever since. It's absolutely bang-on, all the time. All the dirty, overdriven, natural clean sounds – if that makes sense – come from the Steinberger.

I've never played it live, though. Shoegaze was very image-conscious: all about staring at your pedals and being too cool for school. A big white Steinberger wouldn't have fitted in. Bill Wyman had the same one. It really has such a cool, angry sound, and there's no dead spots on the neck. It sounds really alive, with loads of tonal quality.

Live, I've always used a Music Man Stingray, right from the early days. I bought



"SHOEGAZE WAS VERY IMAGE-CONSCIOUS: ALL ABOUT STARING AT YOUR PEDALS AND BEING TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL"

it brand new in 1990. I still play it: it really is a nice bass, nothing comes close to its sound. I also use a Fender Jaguar bass as a live backup, but it's active so it's a bit lively, so the nice people at Fender have given me an American P-Bass which I'm going to take out on the next dates, just to deal with the songs that have a classic bass sound.

Strings? I have no idea what I use. The guitar player always asks me what gauge I want, and I tell him just to replace whatever's currently on there. I know they're roundwounds. I love the sound of nearly new strings: two or three days into a tour, they sound perfect. A few days after that, I'm itching to get new strings on there, which can get expensive.

I've got two Ampeg SVT heads, coupled with two 8x10 cabs. I use one at a time, the other is a backup. I've also got Andy's [Bell, guitarist and long-time Oasis bassist] old Ampeg top that he used when he was in Oasis and Beady Eye – and that's absolutely beautiful. It's my number one rig, although I was talking to the guys at Fender and I might take out one of their tops as a backup. Was I ever in line for the Oasis job when Andy got it? If I was, no-one told me!

Being a bassist, you're always in awe of the two guitarists, who have two pedalboards each, so I try to make up for it... I've got three distortion or overdrive pedals that I use for different songs: a Wampler Low Blow, which I also use for recording because it's so versatile and it's got a lot of control.

I've also got a Malekko B:Assmaster, which does an angry, buzzing-bee tone really well. Then my go-to overdrive is a Boss ODB-3, which has got loads of bottom end and a nice crisp top, which is how I like it.

Back in the day I had a Roger Mayer pedal that Roger custom-built for me. At the time I couldn't find a distortion pedal that retained the bottom end. I used that for years in the 90s, but when I came back to it this time, the parts had corroded. I got Origin Effects to clone it, and they did a pretty good job, but technology has moved on so much that the Boss just couldn't be beaten.

I was about 10 when I started on bass. My dad brought home a bass guitar one day, so I plugged it into my music centre, put on some reggae and managed to find my way around it, because the bass-lines were fairly repetitive. That's basically how it started. A neighbour of mine was a drummer, and we used to play what we thought was dub for hours, just jamming.

When I later joined a band, they already had a bass player but they kicked him out to let me in, and he very kindly pointed out that I couldn't play for toffee and gave me one of the biggest tips ever, which was how to stroke the strings rather than pluck them. That's the only lesson I've ever had. ■

Weather Diaries **is out now on Wichita Recordings.**
Info: http://ridemusic.net

THREE BASS HIT

How Ned Steinberger redesigned the bass world – three times!

Words: Jim Reilly

In the world of bass guitar design, the name Ned Steinberger conjures up many different images. Some people envision Sting or Jamaaladeen Tacuma jumping around, playing an odd-looking bass with a huge sound and incongruously tiny body. Others see Tony Levin strutting across Peter Gabriel's stage with an electric upright. Still others picture Grace Chatto bowing an electric cello with pop sensation Clean Bandit. For those really in the know, the name Ned Steinberger brings to mind not only those images but also pictures of a bass with a curved, ergonomic body – and a huge number of players and fellow instrument builders inspired by that design. Ned's designs are all those things and much more.

His story, at its heart, is one of a true designer – someone inspired by problems, who when he or she gets hold of a good one, won't let go until a solution has been found. In Ned's words, "I get obsessed with a problem. I say to myself, over and over, 'There has got to be a way to do this!' Finding a new and better solution to something – something that hasn't been done before – is what excites me."

To really make sense of Ned's achievements in electric bass design and understand what makes his new electric bass – the NS Design Radius – special, we will need to go back to the mid 1970s, and a small, communal, woodworker's co-operative in Brooklyn, New York.

Ned's father Jack is a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, who at 96 still holds regular office hours at the CERN nuclear research facility in Geneva. His mother was an artist, best known for her representational paintings. Never one for academia, Ned fused his father's scientific mindset with his mother's artistic vision and as a young man found success designing furniture and cabinets. Happenstance brought him to that small woodworker's co-op. The cabinetmaker Ned had been working for was closing up shop and selling his gear. A young luthier named Stuart Spector stopped by looking for a bargain: he ended getting a 24-foot belt sander – and Ned Steinberger.

This was 1976, when real innovation was happening in the bass world. Alembic, and other manufacturers, had already had success with neck-through designs and active electronics. Stuart Spector was already making guitars, and had a bass design. Spector's corner of the co-op was opposite Ned's. (Another young guitar builder, Vinny Fodera, worked in the shop too: his first job was cutting pearl for the Spector logos.)

One day, while discussing the challenges of bass guitar building, Ned offered to take a stab at a new design. He had never built a musical instrument, but Spector was game and told him to go for it.

From the outset, Ned approached creating Stuart's bass from a true designer's perspective. Feel, comfort and style were paramount. His first step was to strap on several basses and get a sense of how they felt, not in the hands of a player with preconceived notions of what a bass should be, but in the hands of an innocent, looking at a problem with fresh eyes.

Immediately, the bass's disproportionately heavy headstock and the resulting neck dive made no sense to Ned. The instrument was unbalanced, and in the world of furniture and cabinet manufacture an unbalanced design would never fly. While prototyping what would become the Spector NS-1, Ned experimented with both streamlining the body and headstock and using counterweights to offset the neck dive. He also made the body more comfortable by gluing two 'wings' onto a neck-through structure. Both wings were curved, creating an arch that fit securely and comfortably against the player.

Ned Steinberger with Tony Levin

In the end, he solved the balance issue simply and ingeniously. By playing with the size of the top horn and moving the strap endpin further up the body, Ned changed the instrument's centre of gravity. The resulting bass balanced better, distributed the weight evenly across the shoulders and back, and looked great.

The NS-1 was released in 1977 and was an instant hit. Parkash John, Alice Cooper's bassist at the time, was one of the first players to pick one up. Pete Briquette of the Boomtown Rats and Loverboy's Scott Smith soon followed. One of Stuart's fondest early success stories is of Keith Jones, who was playing with Carlos Santana when he got his NS-1. They were recording in the same studio as Bob Marley, and Jones ended up sitting in and recording with that bass on Marley's tune, 'Jamming'.

By 1979, in addition to the NS-1 with its single P-style pickup, Spector had added an NS-2 with a P/J pickup combination. Countless players and recordings feature the Spector NS-2. Forty years later, the design remains the cornerstone of the Spector bass line.

After designing the NS-1, Ned was hooked. Instrument design was fun, rewarding and challenging. Although he had hit a home run on his first swing, the inherent struggles and challenges with bass design, particularly with regard to balance, kept nagging him.

Creative thinkers have a few options. They can think inside the box and refine what already exists; they can think outside the box and use the past to create something new – or they can blow up the box, start from a blank slate and bring something entirely new to life. Ned's next instrument was total blow-up-the-box thinking.

Once again, unencumbered with a player's past, Ned asked himself, 'Stripped to its very essence, what does an electric bass guitar need?' The answer was simply a vibrating string and a magnetic field to pick up that vibration. Add to that the need for balance and comfort – and the realisation that there was no need for a new instrument to look like one from the past – and he was off.

"I realised that a headless instrument would never look like a conventional instrument," says Ned. "I needed to create a whole new animal."

© Leahgarlandphotography
Bakithi Kumalo with his WAV Radius bass

One of the new range of NS Radius basses

His first attempt was a total failure. He carved a small, rectangular body and moved the tuning pegs from the headstock to the body. The instrument was light and balanced, but had uneven, wimpy tone with dead spots all across the neck. In an attempt to figure out why the instrument failed, he clamped it to a 200lb wooden workbench. Like magic, once clamped to the extremely heavy, dense table, it sounded great! Instantly, Ned realised the bass's sound was a reflection of the relationship between its rigidity and its mass. The more rigid the structure, the less mass would be required for a satisfying bass tone.

At the time, in the late 1970s, fibreglass was the most rigid material Ned could easily access, so he covered that first bass in fibreglass and the results were encouraging. Enter P. Robert Young, who almost singlehandedly created the fibreglass lifeboat industry and was an expert in both fibreglass and carbon fibre construction. Young taught Ned the finer points of the materials and how to mould and finish the product.

Many prototypes, failures and successes later, Ned had produced the Steinberger L2 bass, so named for its two low-impedance pickups. He also made H1 and H2 models, with high-impedance DiMarzios, as well as an L1, but the L2 quickly became the model of choice.

Everything about the L2 was new, but three features made it exceptional. First, the carbon fibre graphite material: the entire bass was constructed from this fibre and resin composite and was incredibly rigid. Early demos had featured Ned's sales partner Hap Kuffner standing on the bass suspended between two chairs, then picking it up and playing it, still perfectly in tune. Rigidity gave it tone and extraordinary sustain. It was impervious to heat, humidity and climate changes – the perfect instrument for travelling pros.

The next revolutionary feature was Ned's headless design, with his straight-pull, bridge-mounted tuning system. Traditional bass tuners average an 18:1 gear ratio, which means that you need to turn the tuning knob 18 times to get one complete revolution. The higher the number of turns, the finer and subtler the tuning possibilities. Ned's tuners had a 40:1 ratio. Also, the string pulled straight from the neck's end through the bridge with no bends or twists around a tuning peg, resulting in an exceedingly stable string which stayed in tune like nothing that had come before.

While those two features were great on their own, the secret to the Steinberger's balance and comfort was Ned's 'pivot plate'. Contoured like the back of the Spector NS-1, the bass's strap attached to either end of the plate. The plate then attached to the instrument's back at the bass's absolute centre of gravity. The result was an instrument that hung in perfect balance, with completely even weight distribution that could be adjusted to any height or playing angle.

"The pivot was key to the ergonomics of the bass," says Ned, "but it was a radical departure from what players were expecting. In my youth I was pushing boundaries that, after 40 years of making instruments, I would no doubt shy away from today. After all, what self-respecting bassist would want a plastic instrument with the head chopped off, suspended on a prosthetic device? It was a lot to ask of musicians who are naturally loyal to the instruments they play and love."

© Lauren Desberg Photography

Michael Thuler (formerly of *The Stephen Colbert Show*) with his Radius

"IN MY YOUTH I WAS PUSHING BOUNDARIES THAT, AFTER 40 YEARS OF MAKING INSTRUMENTS, I WOULD NO DOUBT SHY AWAY FROM TODAY"

EMG's Rob Turner built custom pickups for the L2. He added steel into the pickup, which gave them a natural mid-range boost. While most bass pickups roll off the mids, the active EMGs in the Steinbergers added them. On its own, the rigid carbon-fibre provided highs and lows. By adding the mids, the overall frequency response was unparalleled, consistent from instrument to instrument and uniform all over the neck. Even when played today, it's amazing how the frequency response and volume remain consistent from the very highest notes to the very lowest. It's

© John Peden

almost as if there's a naturally built-in compression, smoothing and rounding out the tone.

Once they heard the bass, players were sold on the L2. Tony Levin bought the very first commercially available bass – an unlined fretless. John Entwistle and the Dixie Dregs' Andy West were next in line and purchased prototypes before Steinberger officially went into business.

In 1980, Ned, along with Robert Young, Hap Kuffner and Stanley Jay, founded the Steinberger Sound Corporation, working from their shop in the Red Hook district of Brooklyn. From the outset, production couldn't keep up with demand. Popularity peaked in 1982 with Sting being featured on the cover of *Guitar World* magazine holding his L2. In 1983, the company relocated to Newburgh, New York. Shortly after that, guitars with the L2 body shape – but minus the pivot plate – were introduced, followed by guitars and basses with more traditional body shapes.

The 1980s were a perfect storm for both Steinberger basses and guitars. Not only did the basses sound and play like nothing else, they also fit the bill visually. MTV fell in love with the sleek, futuristic look of the instrument, as did bass players who were moving out from the back of the stage to take more prominent roles in their bands.

However, Ned had never intended to be a businessman. The original plan was to license his design to a major manufacturer, as he had done with his design for Spector. In 1987, as the demands of the business grew and running it became less enjoyable, Ned sold Steinberger Sound to Gibson. Gibson kept the original designs alive until 1997. Two years later, Gibson reintroduced the Steinberger line but with new shapes and electronics and without a fully graphite-composite body.

After selling the company, Ned stayed with Gibson for a couple of years, working on new designs and consulting on both Steinbergers and other products. However, company life wasn't for him. In 1990, he started a new instrument design company under the name NS Design. The first NS Design instrument was an electric upright bass. Enamoured with the sonic potential of upright acoustic bass's 42-" string length, Ned created an electric upright that stood out from the crowd with an equally useful pizzicato and bowed sound. Creating the NS Design upright bass led to a whole family of bowed electric instruments.

Inspired by the piezo pickups in the bowed instruments and a new self-clamping tuning system designed for the NS Design violin, in 2013 Ned decided to design a bass that would be a significant improvement on his earlier designs. The result was the NS Design Radius.

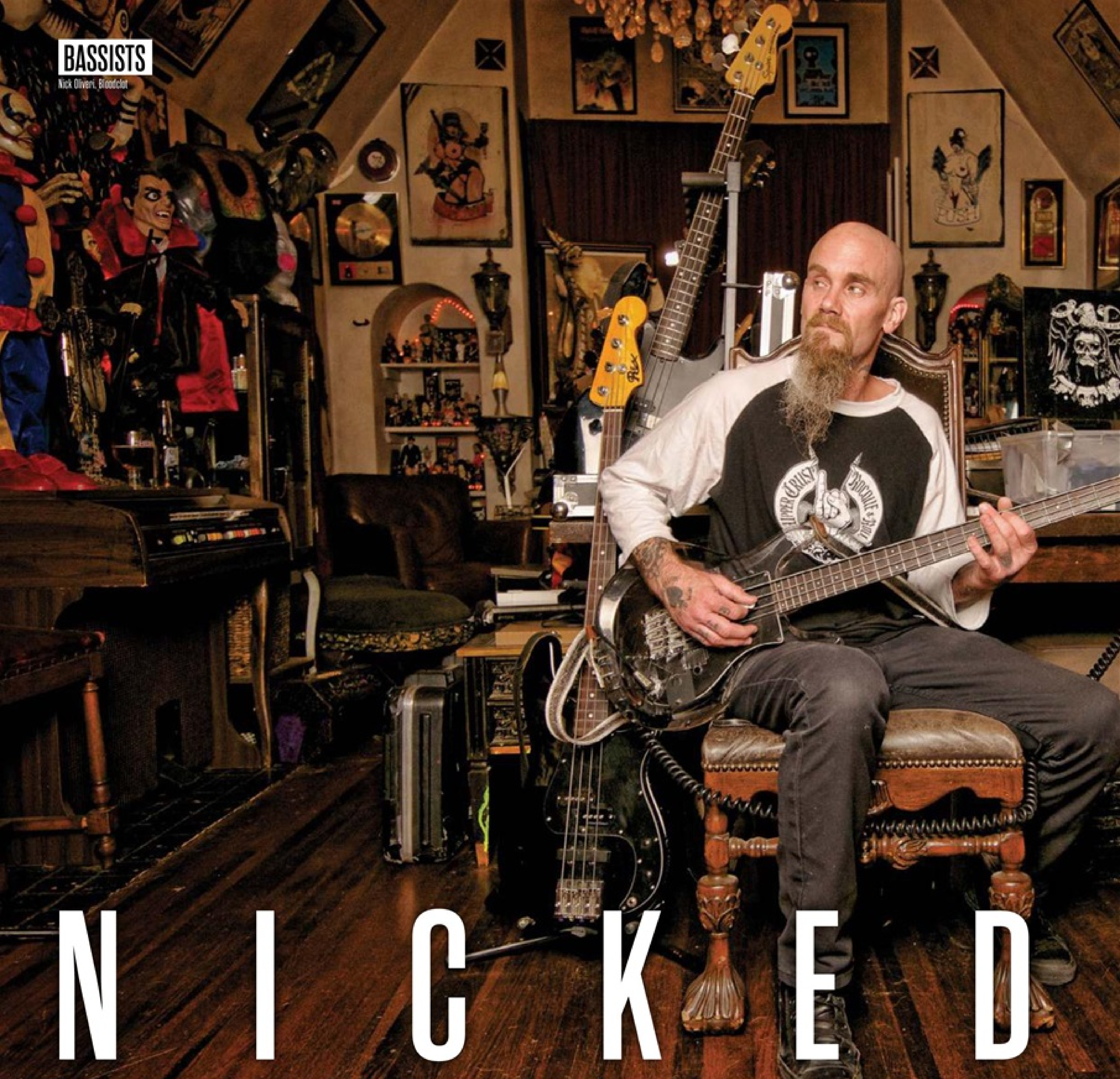
From his Spector design, Ned developed a new, wooden, curved, ergonomic and streamlined body. From the Steinberger, he took the headless and straight-pull tuning concepts and a refined active EMG pickup system. From NS Design, Ned added a piezo transducer under the bridge, the self-clamping tuning system and, in the CR models, graphite reinforced necks. Each of these features was a natural progression from earlier designs. It's almost like the Steinberger bass's sound and response was re-envisioned into a body design that naturally fit the player.

Nowadays, the bass marketplace is going through a phase where vintage – and vintage-looking – instruments dominate. Still, there are many top bassists finding their way to Ned's Radius basses. Bakithi Kumalo, best known as Paul Simon's *Graceland* bassist, plays both NS Design uprights and Radius basses. So does Michael Thurber, best known for his work on the *Stephen Colbert Show* and the musical collective CDZA. Originally an acoustic upright bassist, Thurber had an NS Design electric upright, but really got excited when the Radius came out.

At the age of 68, Ned shows no signs of slowing down. Bowed instrument sales are going well, the Radius basses are finding a home and he's about to release a new guitar design for NS Design. The original gangster of love, Steve Miller himself, has ordered a half dozen. In addition, Ned is staying true to his designer roots and his original aspirations. NS Design is far less stressful than Steinberger Sound was, and he's able to collaborate with other builders, designers and companies. Whenever you see an 'NS' in a music store these days, whether it's on an acoustic bass pickup, a guitar tuner or a new strap-lock system, it stands for Ned Steinberger.

As he reflects on his contribution to bass design, Ned says, "With my first design for Stuart, I took the essentials of traditional electric bass design as a given, and worked within this framework. This work led me to the headless concept, which by its radical nature catapulted me into outer space, resulting in the Steinberger bass. The NS Radius combines the best features of these earlier instruments with more recent innovations in tuner and pickup technology. For me, it's a continuing quest."

Time will tell whether the Radius electric basses achieve the iconic status of the Spector NS and the Steinberger L2. Regardless, Ned's place as one of the most significant and important electric bass guitar innovators of his generation is securely in place. After all, he has redefined the instrument three times over.



NICKED

Nick Oliveri has survived a career of implausible chaos with Kyuss, Queens Of The Stone Age, the Dwarves and many other bands including his new project, Bloodclot. Take it away, Nick...

Bloodclot was already formed by John [Joseph, Cro-Mags], Todd [Youth, Warzone] and Joey [Castillo, ex-Queens of the Stone Age] by the time I joined: I'm happy that I got to be a part of it, because when I heard the demos I was taken back to when I was a kid, listening to bands like Cro-Mags. I saw them play with Motörhead in 1986, and I'm in the video for their song 'We Gotta Know' somehow, so I'm really excited to play with them. I did the bass after the songs were recorded, which is tougher than if you play it live: the stuff is quite demanding on your picking hand – you have to really command your part.

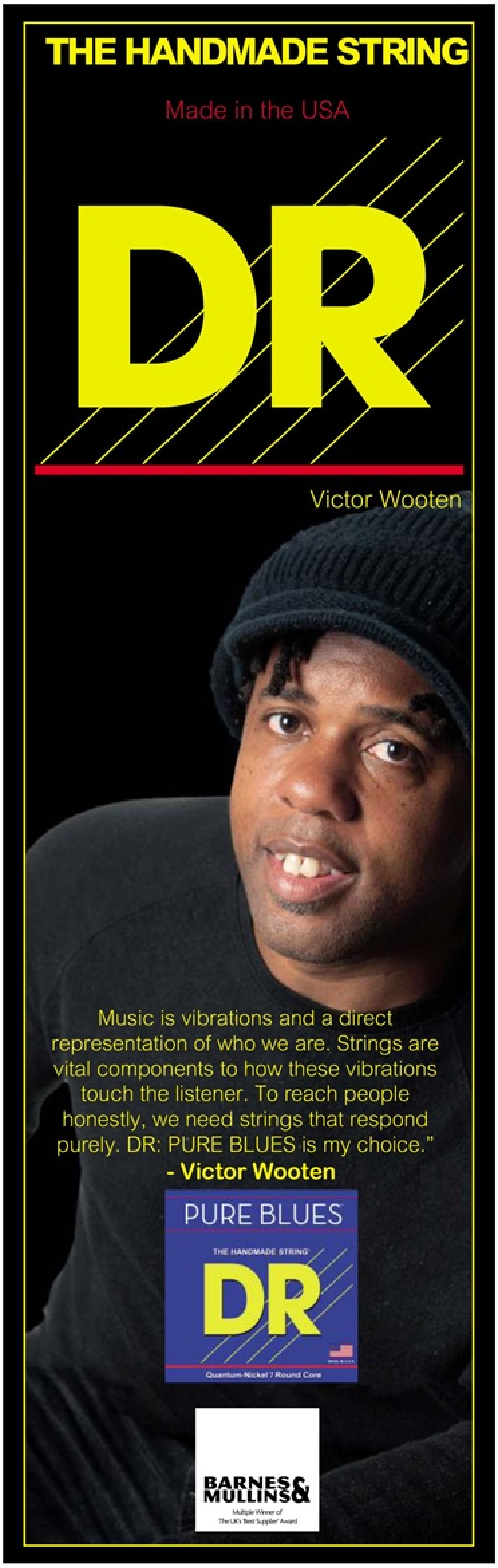
I have a bunch of different gear that I've picked up over the years, as you can imagine. There's a lot of old and new stuff, but for the last few years I've been using Orange 4x10 cabs. They look like 2x10s, but there's two more 10s behind them: I can transport them around more easily than a big 8x10 fridge! I also like the old Acoustic 360 heads, so I've been using one of the newer solid-state ones, although I like to use tubes in the studio. Solid-state amps travel better too, especially because it's been a while since I had anybody setting up my gear and matching the tubes, which I definitely don't know how to do.

For bass guitars, I always use the same Fender Precisions and a Dan Armstrong. I had a bass made for me from the ground up by a buddy of mine, he made a P/J Special with both pickups. It's got more of a Jazz neck in the low registers: it gets thinner at the bottom like a Jazz would. It doesn't have a name on it: it's just a black bass, and that's the one I use in Bloodclot. It plays

super sweet. We tune to E flat and I use 105s: in the other bands I do which have lots of downtuning, I use 110s. I guess I should play a five-string in bands that tune down to B or C.

I use a Boss Hyper Fuzz with a gain boost on it: I turn the level all the way up to where I want it to grind a little bit, and I keep that on all the time. They don't make them any more. The other pedal I use is a Green Rhino overdrive for certain bass-featured parts, where I need a little more lift, so I can jump out more. I don't have any compression on my amp – I guess they have to do that at the board, because I tend to go full balls out when I play. I probably could use some compression to smooth things down and make it bigger... but I've yet to get that smart.

Up In Arms **is out shortly.**
Info: www.facebook.com/bloodclotofficial



RAINEY DAYS

The great session bassist Chuck Rainey discusses his unique career with Ellen O'Reilly

Chuck Rainey's name is synonymous with some of the biggest hits of the last 50 years. From Aretha Franklin to Steely Dan, Chuck has laid down the low end on some of the world's most iconic albums. I had the pleasure of discussing his incredible career with the man himself while he was teaching as a professor at last year's Warwick Bass Camp.

After one of his classes specialising in improvisation, I sit down with Chuck and he tells me: "It's hard to use the right descriptive word. For example, with the word 'improvisation', people misuse it – because if you improvise a bass-line that doesn't mean that you're necessarily improving it, you are just adding your smile to it. The average young person goes too far. I suggest that you just go a little bit more, because sometimes a little bit *is* more."

He continues: "For the last 25 years I've been looking at my playing and thinking what works and what doesn't work. A part with too many notes doesn't work: it gets in the way. In the rhythm section we're usually together – we go down the same street – so we're together if it's wrong, but as the bass player you have more stability if you're right, because the bass is the foundation. Underneath this building is a slab of concrete holding it up – that's the bass."

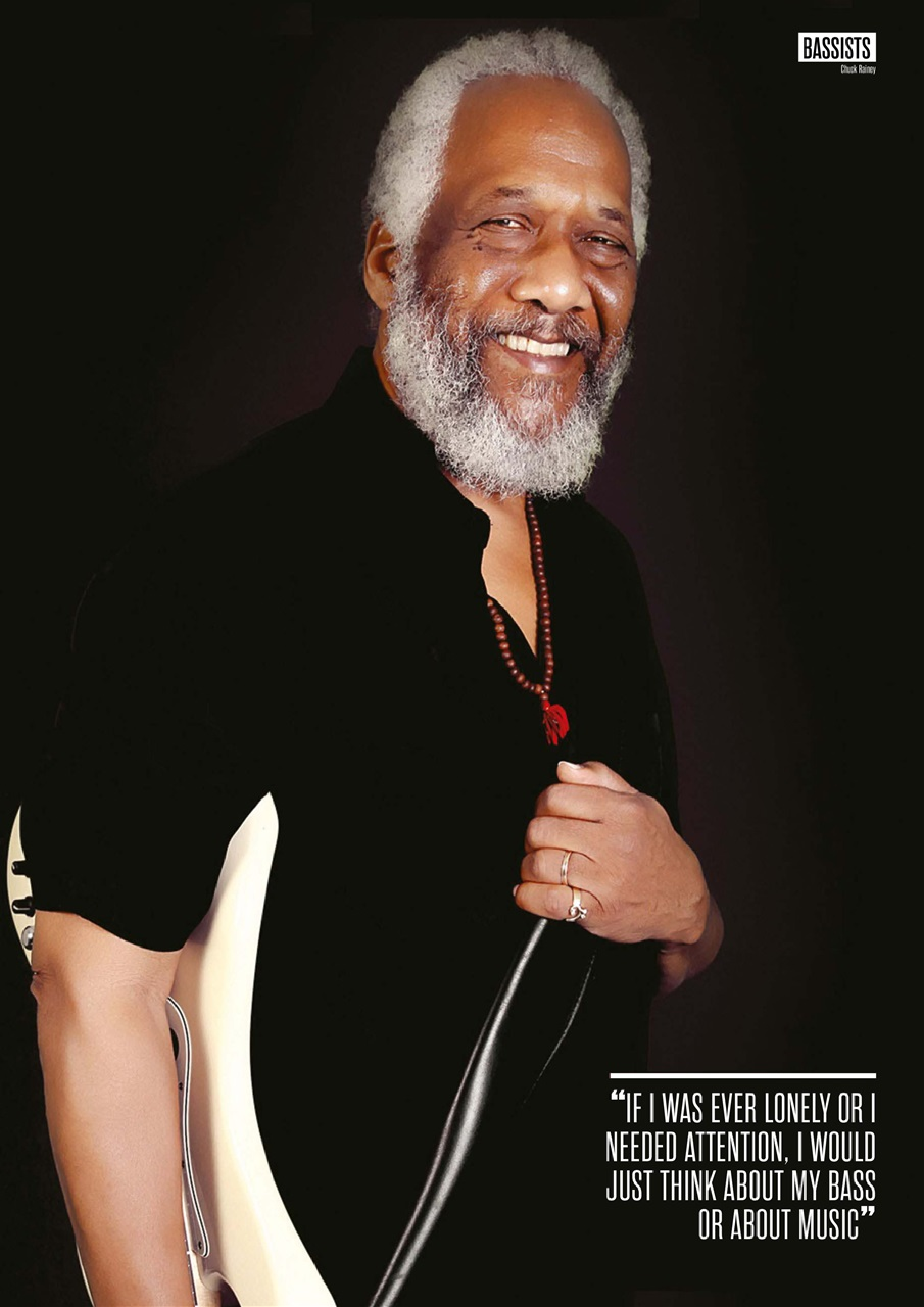
In his class, Chuck focused on jazzing up a bass-line while maintaining a solid groove, asking his students to participate by playing a simple I-V-VIII sequence over a static chord and then adding slight nuances and syncopations to it. He also had some invaluable advice for any player who aspires to make it as a full-time musician, and that is to put your heart into it. "A bass is an inanimate object, but it has energy because you put energy into it," he said. "If a young player doesn't really love to play, then they are going to suffer, because they don't get paid, the road is long, your gig gets cancelled or whatever other reason. However, if you love to play, then those things don't bother you as much as the person who is just working for the money. If you love something, it pays you back. I love music and I love playing the bass, and because I love it, I don't have to suffer."

Chuck eases back into his chair and tells me a story involving his own struggles as a young musician. "I was playing in New York City, and quite a few times you'd play but you wouldn't get paid for whatever reason. Being young and staying in a hotel or whatever, if you didn't have money for the room, they'd put a lock on your door and you couldn't get in! So I'd have to ride the train all night to the flat of a friend of mine who would let me stay there." He adds: "None of us got paid! We would play, say, 30 songs, and if one of those songs was great, that's what kept me alive and happy. I'd just remember that one song because I love music. A lot of people get angry if they don't get paid, but anger brings nothing but further frustrations. The music should come first – if you don't love to do this, then do something else."

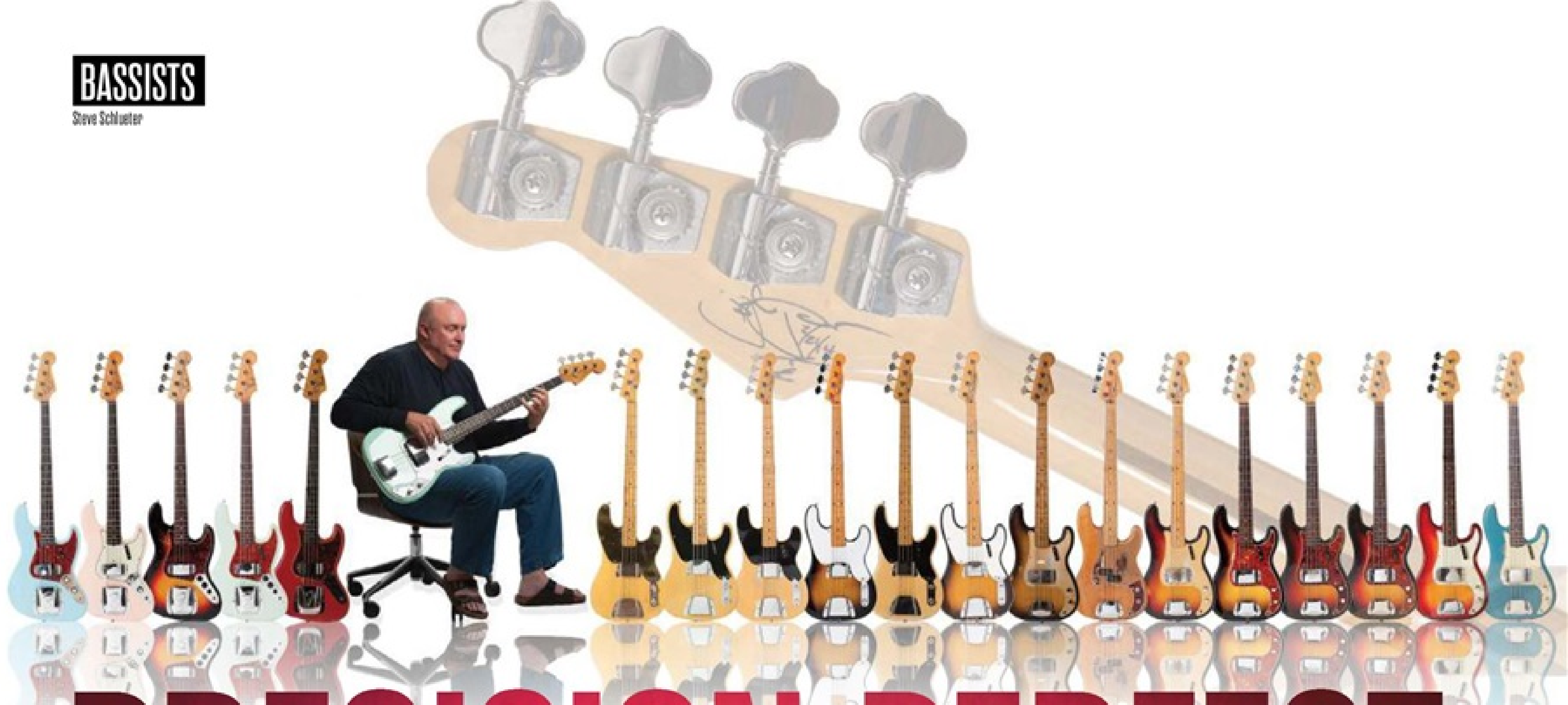
As you can see, Chuck has a very emotional connection not only with his instrument, but with music as a whole. He tells us: "During my career, if I was ever lonely or I needed attention, I would just think about my bass or about music. I could sit for hours just thinking of my favourite song and then I'd be okay. I certainly feel like I've got company when I've got a bass on me." Take a look at the amazing Xotic Chuck Rainey XPJ-1T signature model, and you'll see what he means.

Asked about his affiliation with the Warwick Bass Camp, he says: "I do two bass camps a year, but the Warwick Bass Camp is different because they bring people here from all walks of life. The professors [tutors] have attained a lot of success in the industry, and we all say the same thing – we just say it from our perspective. Younger people have to understand that there's no one way to do anything. It depends on who you are and how you are. Some people talk too much, some people don't talk enough, some people are too shy, some people are too bold, but they all want to go to this building here and they get here by going different ways. You don't have to play a Warwick instrument to come to this camp; you don't have to play a Warwick amplifier. Just about all my career I've been teaching or doing bass camps, I always talk about not going too far. But still you have to learn – I'm still learning. I'm still a student of the bass."

Info: http://chuckrainey.com



"IF I WAS EVER LONELY OR I NEEDED ATTENTION, I WOULD JUST THINK ABOUT MY BASS OR ABOUT MUSIC"



PRECISION PERFECT

Fender aficionado Steve Schlueter returns to *BGM* with what may be the world's definitive Precision collection.

Interview: Hywel Davies

You may remember the name Steve Schlueter from a few years ago. Appearing back in *BGM* 97, the avid bass collector went into detail about his remarkable Fender collection, which included every production model produced between 1951 and 2001. It would take a lot to outdo an outstanding accomplishment such as this, but as it turns out, he's gone and done just that.

Schlueter has successfully tracked down the ultra-rare pre CBS Jazz and Precision basses from 1951 through to 1964. These instruments represent the last of the original, Fender-built guitars. For Schlueter, these basses played a pivotal role in laying down the blueprint for the electric solid-bodies that followed them.

"You know, when Leo Fender sold out to CBS in January 1965, it was a defining point in the company's history, and therefore a natural collecting point," he explains. "This collection allows me to examine the evolution of the Fender and Jazz lines, and also to review component purchases and manufacturing techniques that can later be compared to CBS-era basses and post-CBS-era basses. It's all part of the history of the electric bass. To be complete, I had to collect all 14 Precisions and the five Jazz basses. While the Jazz had only five pre-CBS years, it evolved quickly."

"Choosing a clear favourite is impossible," he continues. "If we look at just the all-original pre-CBS basses, I like the '53, '57, and '63 Precisions the best, and the '61 Jazz stacker. Honourable mention to the '54/'55 P, just for comfort."

Some of Schlueter's basses have been played by notable players in the past, he tells *BGM*. "Several have been owned and played by famous people prior to my ownership. My favourite in that area is my '58 Precision, which was the primary bass for Bob Babbitt of the Funk Brothers during his East Coast session days. It is heavily modified but has an incredible sound, and talk about mojo!"

Has it become harder to locate instruments such as these in mint condition, we ask? "Absolutely! Even if you are willing to sell the farm, finding a mint bass that is 50-plus years old and for sale is darn near impossible. In fact, if I saw one for sale in mint condition, I would doubt its originality until I authenticated it – but that's not a bad thing.

"Some of us actually prefer a bass that has been played, but well cared for, as opposed to a mint-condition bass that was bought and locked away forever. I'm not saying I wouldn't buy that bass, but there is no history there. The first question I ask a seller is where he or she got the bass, and then I try to trace it back as far as I can. More often than not the search reaches a dead end before I find the original buyer, but what I do learn is always interesting, and sometimes I find a bass that has some serious roots. For me, learning the history of an instrument is part of the enjoyment I get from collecting."

One big factor that hinders not only Schlueter, but any collector, is fraud, an issue that is plaguing the vintage bass community. He is committed to spreading awareness anywhere he can to help clamp down on counterfeit basses. "Anyone who has played a quality vintage bass will testify as to what a sweet experience it is. However, the rise of the vintage bass market has also given rise to fraud. I could fill a page just listing issues I have come across in recent years," he warns.

"My advice, if you want to add a vintage bass to your arsenal, is to make sure that it has been authenticated by a professional who you know and trust before you buy it. A seller won't want to ship to you before payment, but an honourable seller will not mind sending the bass through a known third party professional for confirmation. If the bass is what it should be, you'll end up paying two shipping charges and an appraisal fee, but you get an appraisal which you need for insurance anyway. If the bass doesn't measure up, you pay nothing, and you'll have saved a ton of money. And if the seller says no, that tells you a lot right off!"

Info: steve@affprod.com

GEAR REVIEWS

£394.99
48
STERLING BY MUSIC MAN SUB RAY5

£3,800
52
RIKKERS Local Wood Treeline Singlecut 5

£2,199
56
SANDBERG California Ida Nielsen

£340 and £426
60
YAMAHA TRBX305MGR and TRBX504TBN

£759
64
MARKBASS EVO 1

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass speakers and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's particularly useful for bassists, and we'll test recording equipment and general accessories every now and then as well, but generally speaking, this zone is for bass-specific gear.

We take the ratings that we give each item very seriously. *BGM* is the only print magazine devoted to bass in this country, and we have readers from all over the world, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your investigation, we'll say so; if it's flawed in some way, we won't hold back from making that clear. We're not beholden to advertisers in any way and our conclusions are entirely independent of the views of manufacturers, musicians and distributors.

When you read about a bass-related product here, you know you're getting a sensible, balanced review from an experienced bass tester. Value for money is at the top of our agenda in these cash-strapped times, but on the other hand, we believe in paying for quality.

Right, that's enough from me. Remember, this is just about the only place that it's good to have GAS!*
Joel McIver, editor

*GAS = Gear Acquisition Syndrome (a malaise often suffered by bass players)

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN
SUB RAY5

The Stingray 5 is an industry standard – but how does its budget-friendly little brother stack up? Mike Brooks puts it through its paces

Professional Music Technology
www.pmtonline.co.uk

£394.99

The Sterling By Music Man range has been on the market for some time and has cultivated something of a niche for itself. Apparently many bassists are happy to forego the finer details of the full-price instruments for a bass that carries many of the hallmarks associated with the brand, at a price that won't empty their wallets. With a Music Man available for all tastes and at all price points, we thought it prudent to cast an eye over one of the latest affordable offerings to see if the bar was still being reached.

Build Quality

Have no fear, if build quality and product robustness are high on your list of requirements. This bass continues in the fine tradition of Music Man as a robust, sturdy, thoroughly well-constructed instrument. The familiar rounded curves of the gloss-coated basswood body are complemented by the comfortable front and rear contouring and extended cutaways for unhindered upper fret access. The three-ply black scratchplate maintains an air of simplicity, while the black body and maple fingerboard are a classic combination, whichever way you look at it.

The rounded D neck profile will appeal to bassists who like to dig in with their playing. The 16mm string spacing at the bridge offsets the

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £394.99
Made In | China
Colour | Black gloss
Body | Basswood
Neck | Maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, six-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 45mm
Fingerboard | Maple
Frets | 22
Pickups | Passive humbucker
Electronics | Active two-band EQ
Controls | Volume, two-band EQ (bass/treble with cut/boost)
Hardware | Chrome hardware, open elephant-ear machine heads, fixed chrome bridge
Weight | 4.2kg
Case/gig bag included | No
Left-hand option available | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

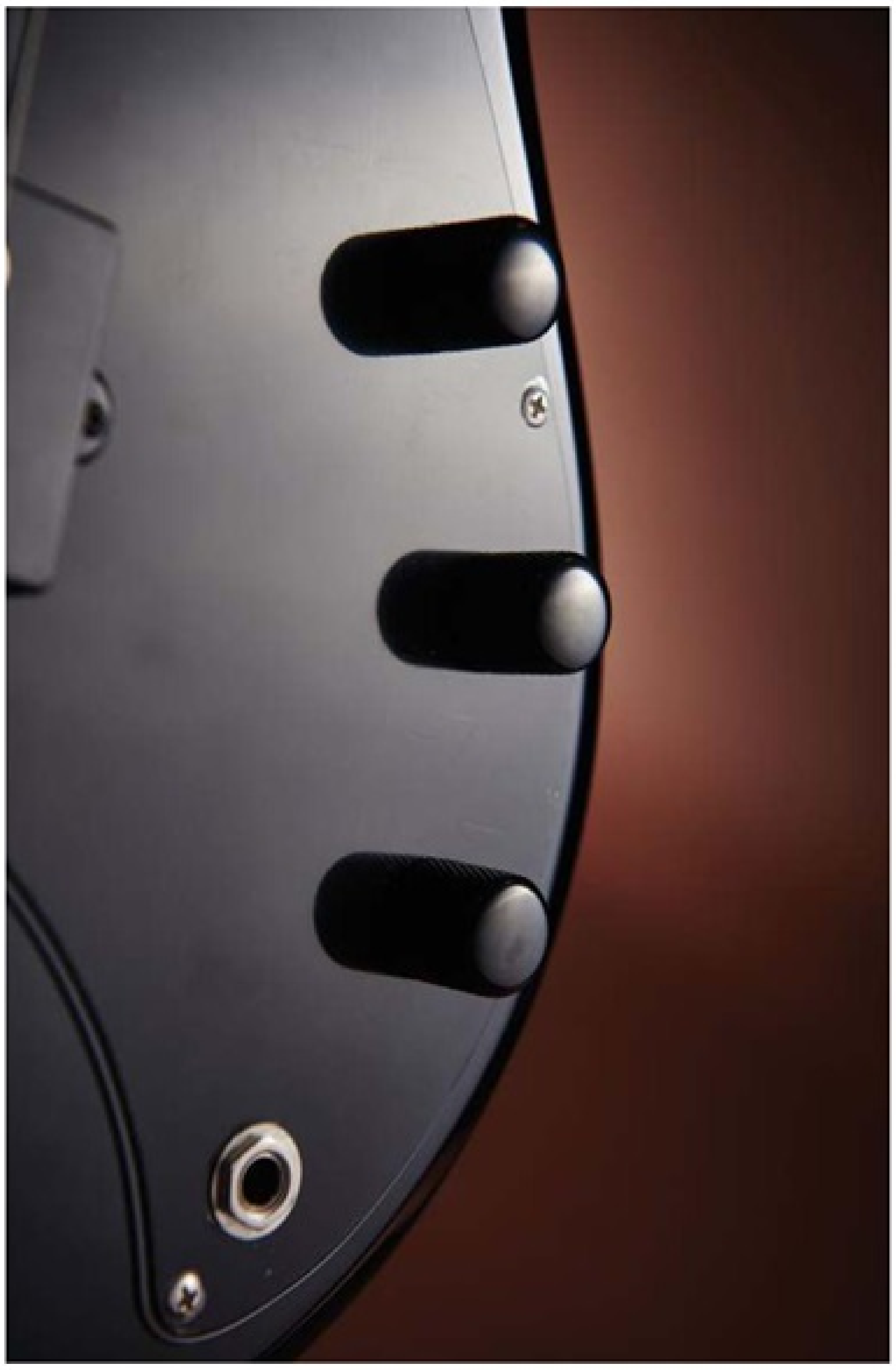
Plus | A great bass at a great price, buy with confidence
Minus | Some corners have obviously been cut
Overall | We can't recommend this bass highly enough. Very impressive!

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	■■■■■■■■□□
SOUND QUALITY	■■■■■■■■■□
VALUE	■■■■■■■■■■

fullness of the neck dimensions, and although some players may find the spacing at the nut a little tight, this is easily adjusted to. The satin-finished maple neck is very playable indeed with no sharp fret ends in evidence, and overall the setup is extremely pleasing. Black position markers have been used on the front and side of the neck, while a standard plastic nut has been incorporated along with the ever-helpful truss rod adjuster at the base of the neck.

Although there is a noticeable headstock bias, the bass sits perfectly against the player's body on a strap. Chrome hardware has been used for the elephant ear tuners and standard fixed bridge, while the control set of volume, bass and treble (both centre-detented for cut/boost operation) are black. A front mounted jack socket – instead of the more customary, and contemporary, side mounted socket – completes the control plate layout.



Sounds & Playability

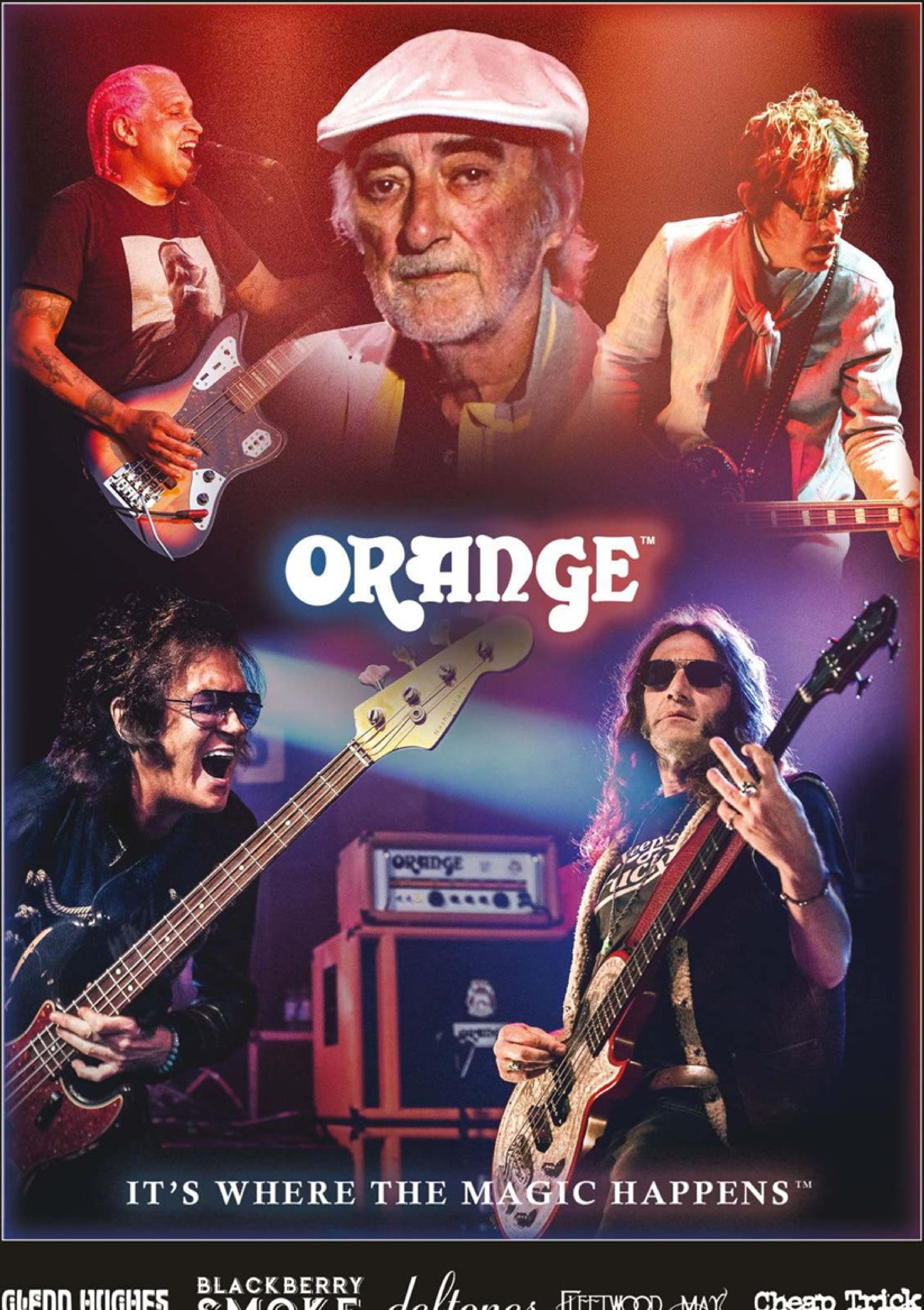
The crash, bang, wallop of a Stingray in full flight is one of the most recognisable bass displays imaginable, and I'm happy to report that this bass is able to re-create many of those signature tones. The thunderous bottom end is clearly evident and although there is no midrange EQ, this bass performs adequately enough without it. With both EQ controls set flat, you're presented with a perfectly usable rounded tone; it's not especially sparkling, but there's no lack of definition.

Finger placement over and around the pickup has a significant effect on your playing tone, so experiment a little and hear for yourself how the tone changes. Try different playing styles, because the effect of pick attack, warmer fingerstyle and percussive techniques all have a marked effect on the tone. Once you've accustomed yourself with these, start cutting and boosting the EQ. With such a simple control layout, you'll quickly learn your way around this bass – and with plenty of brute force on tap, you may find cutting rather than boosting either EQ beneficial.

At this price, you almost feel that this bass doesn't deserve to be this good. String-to-string volume is impressively consistent, and the low B string puts in an admirable display, although the lack of mid EQ restricts its potency. Still, if you want a pocket-friendly five-string with plenty of grunt where it counts, look no further.

Conclusion

What this bass lacks in finesse, it more than makes up for in performance. It's very much a player's bass that will appeal to a broad spectrum of bassists. It also appears to be more than capable of handling the strains of constant playing and transport. At just under £400, you can afford to be less precious about it than you would be about a £2000-plus Stingray 5: it's seriously great value for money and puts some higher-priced fives to shame.



GLENN HUGHES | BLACKBERRY SMOKE | deftones | FLEETWOOD MAC | Cheap Trick

GLENN HUGHES | RICHARD TURNER | SERGIO VEGA | JOHN MCVIE | TOM PETERSSON

RIKKERS

Local Wood Treeline Singlecut 5

Mike Brooks branches out with this unbe-leaf-able bass from the Netherlands. Is it President Trunk, or just barking mad?

Rikkers Guitars & Basses
www.rikkersgitaarbouw.nl

£3,800

We were very impressed by the Rikkers Treeline bass which we reviewed back in *BGM* 128, although its appearance and price point were both a little challenging. Two years later, Dutch luthiers Rikkers have moved the model forward, equipping this year's Treeline with a dyed turquoise fingerboard and a pickup which features switching technology designed to enhance the available tones and performance. The price certainly reflects the craftsmanship – but at approaching four grand, does it have tones that you couldn't live without?

Build Quality

There's no escaping the startling visuals of the Treeline range, although if the gaps in the timber were filled in, I'm sure that bassists of traditional taste would be drawn to this singlecut design as well as the avant-garde among us. Fortunately, the nature of this design leads to certain benefits, namely improved balance and a very manageable three-kilo weight.

Utilising local German olive ash, the light colouring works well with the timber's darker grain – but the real eye-catching element is the turquoise dyed olive ash fingerboard. The flame maple figuring of the fingerboard readily stands out, as does the flame figuring in

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £3800
Made In | Netherlands
Colour | Natural
Body | German olive ash
Neck | German olive ash, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Set neck, glued in
Nut Width | 47mm
Fingerboard | Dyed olive ash
Frets | 24
Pickups | Rikkers Switchbucker
Electronics | Noll active two-band EQ
Controls | Volume, two-band EQ (stacked bass/treble), 2 x pickup switches
Hardware | Gold hardware, Hipshot Ultralite machine heads, ABM bridge, GGR strap buttons
Weight | 3kg
Case/gig bag included | Soft case
Left-hand option available | Yes, as a custom order, no extra charge

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A unique design, plenty of tonal options and sublime playability
Minus | The pricetag and design won't suit everyone
Overall | A bass that won't appeal to the masses – but which deserves to do so

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	■■■■■■■■■■
SOUND QUALITY	■■■■■■■■■□
VALUE	■■■■■■■■□□

the natural neck timber on the reverse of the neck. And wow, what a neck! Benefiting from an outstandingly comfortable D-shaped profile with a sculpted heel at the neck joint, the playability across the whole neck is superb, while an excellent setup, high-quality fret work with no sharp fret ends anywhere and a professional level of finishing take the package to another level. The 19mm string spacing at the bridge and 47mm nut width mean the strings are spaced very well, giving the player room to navigate the fretboard in comfort.

The extensive lower cutaway offers perfect access to the upper frets, while abalone side position markers are matched with pearl markers on the front fingerboard facing. Gold hardware has been used throughout with open-gear Hipshot Ultralite machine heads, an ABM top-loading bridge, gold controls for volume and a stacked bass/treble control. For further tonal flexibility, the Rikkers-produced Switchbucker pickup features two small switches on its housing, allowing the player to select individual coils within the pickup.

Sounds & Playability

The Treeline's light weight and much improved balance are very large positives: this is a great instrument to play. Acoustically, the neck has an inherently woody and organic sound, the tone of which is solid and powerful with plenty of low midrange and natural resonance. Plugging in, we're presented with a well-rounded but lively tone: a quick check of the pickup settings shows that I'm using a Jazz bass pickup arrangement by default. Although the pickup has been designed to operate as four different units in one housing, switching between the single-coil and humbucking options is relatively simple, and the changes in tone are instantly recognisable.

The Treeline's treble response is immaculate, with a crisp top end that has finesse and character without being too glassy or percussive. In terms of playability, I was hard pressed to find fault with this bass in any respect: it's easily one of the most enjoyable five-string instruments I've had the pleasure of playing. The contemporary design, tonal considerations and implementation and the all-round sonic display

are equally pleasing. Fingerstyle tones are solid but refined, while the attack that a pick offers brings another character to the table. Percussive techniques are also well catered for: perhaps the Treeline allows such techniques to project because there's no excessive timber to dampen the performance?

Conclusion

If you have preconceived ideas about this bass, leave them at the door. Like many players, I had my own suspicions: is this a design gimmick, and what does the design actually offer? Well, I can happily report that this is a very fine bass. Its performance far exceeded my expectations: I could happily have carried on playing this bass for days, weeks, even months. Personally, I can live with the visuals because the tones are exceptional. Whether I'd be prepared to part with close to £4,000 for it, I'm not so sure – but don't close your mind to the possibilities which the Treeline offers: it really is something special.

Vanderkley
AMPLIFICATION

High Performance
Bass Equipment

introducing

THE NEW
SPARTAN

WWW.VANDERKLEYAMP.NL

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

RRP | £2199
Made in | Germany
Body | European alder
Neck | Canadian hardrock maple, 34" scale
Neck join | Bolt-on, six bolts
Fretboard | Birdseye maple, 22 frets
Pickups | Sandberg single-coil (neck) and humbucker (bridge)
Controls | Volume (pull for passive), passive tone, active 2-band EQ
Bridge | Sandberg
Tuners | Sandberg with detuner
Weight | 3.9kg
Case/gigbag included? | Soft case
Leftie available? | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Construction and design feel flawless
Minus | You're paying extra for Ida's name on the headstock
Overall | An utterly beautiful bass by anyone's standards

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ■■■■■■■■■■ (10/10)
SOUND QUALITY ■■■■■■■■■■ (10/10)
VALUE ■■■■■■■■□□ (8/10)

SANDBERG
California Ida Nielsen

Ida Nielsen, sometime bassist with the late genius Prince, gets her own, suitably fabulous Sandberg. Joel McIver prepares his thumb

Synergy Distribution
www.synergydistribution.co.uk

£2199

If you witnessed Danish bassist Ida Nielsen levelling the crowds at this year's London Bass Guitar Show, you'll know what a huge asset she was to 3rd Eye Girl, the backing band which played with Prince from 2014 until his tragic death last year. A slap and funk player of enormous dexterity, Ida can be heard on his Royal Purpleness's *Plectrumelectrum* album and three solo releases: a signature Sandberg California model has been in the works for some time, and we've been lucky enough to have one land on our doormat courtesy of UK distributors Synergy.

Build Quality

At almost £2200, you'd expect nothing less than the finest design, engineering and construction from this bass, and indeed that is what you get. The general feel is sumptuous, with Asian silk beneath the pickguard, beautiful gold hardware and fluorescent side dots on the neck. Six bolts anchor the 22-fret neck to the body and a matched headstock adds a touch of zing. Talking of the headstock, we're so used to small, streamlined machine heads round here that when a bass with the full elephant-ear set arrives, you're reminded how easy they are to operate. These are like the earlobes of a mammoth that's been dipped in gold leaf.

We're also told that Sandberg have applied their vibration treatment to Ida's bass: in other words, 100 hours – four days or so – of machine-generated jiggling has been applied to it to ensure that everything

is ready for the road. It certainly feels rock-solid. The fine details are all in place too, from the thumb rest (easily removed if you prefer to anchor your thumb on a pickup or the E string), the easy-access battery compartment, the detuner and of course Ida's signature, etched onto the rear of the headstock.

Sounds & Playability

Plug in and marvel at the extremely low action, permitting effortless thumb slaps and pops as well as shreddy fingerstyle, the two cornerstones of Ida's technique. There are those who prefer a higher action, of course, in which case that big ol' golden bridge will be only too happy to oblige, offering three Allen key sockets per saddle.

The solidity and excellent balance of the bass makes you glad that it's been designed with 22 frets rather than 24: a two-octave neck would have felt gratuitous, somehow, especially with that meaty headstock and its massive gold tuners winking at you from your peripheral vision.

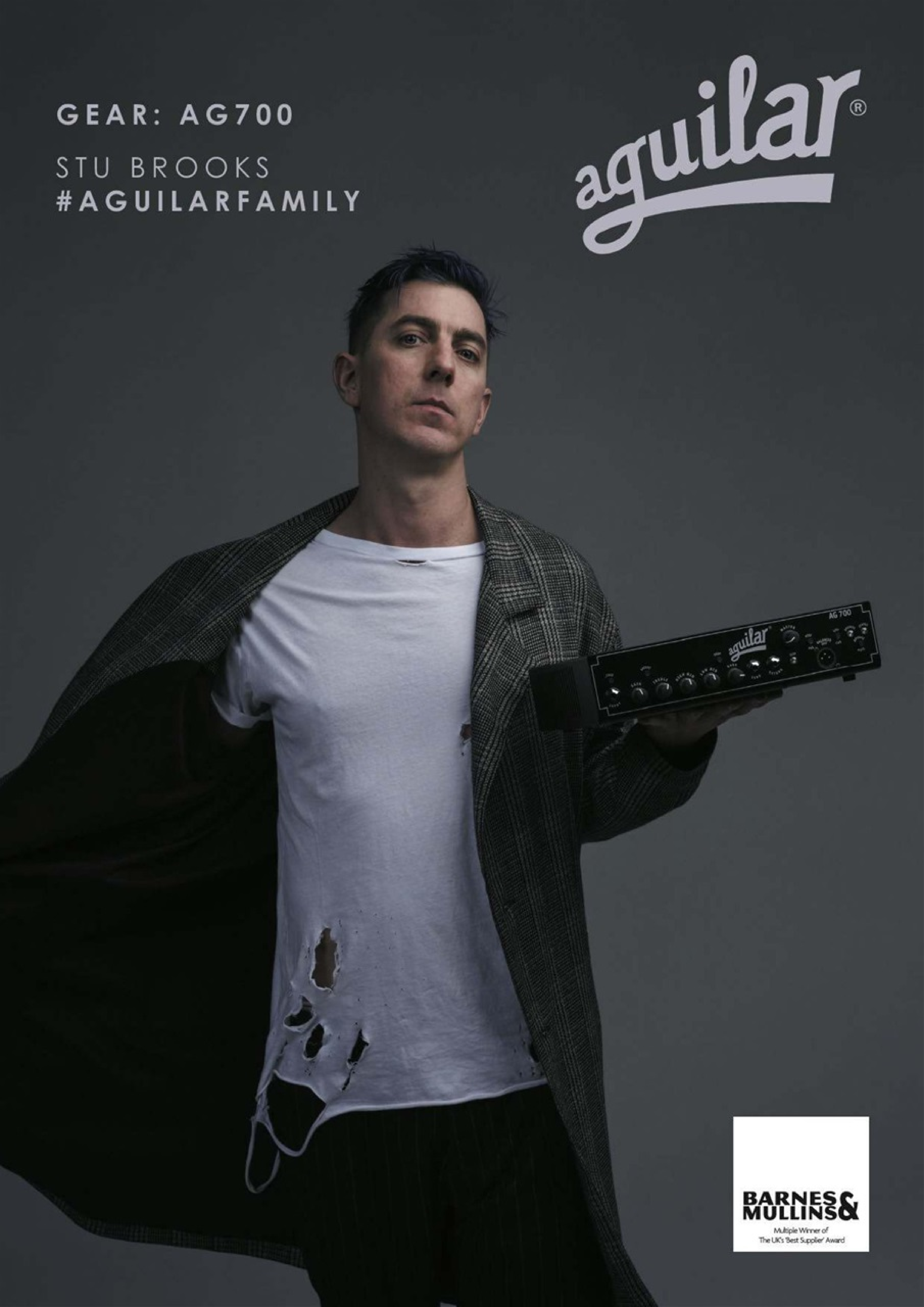
With a single-coil pickup situated at the middle of the body rather

than near the neck, and a humbucker at the bridge, plus active and passive options, you'd expect a wide tone range, and you'd be right to do so. Detented centrally, the two-band EQ is adequate but familiar, so utilise the boosts for a proper dose of adrenaline. The bass boost in particular is monstrous, so keep a delicate eye on it. As per Ida's preferred playing style and tone, there's ample top end too, so slap players will be in hog heaven.

A word about the passive tone control, which we've recently come to regard as the unsung hero of bass guitar EQ. We get so many hot-rod basses with turbocharged pickups and circuits through our doors these days that it's refreshing to go back to a simple volume plus tone setup, and Ida's bass does the basics perfectly. Maybe we're getting old, but in passive mode, this instrument sounds divine.

Conclusion

What a beautiful bass this is – but on the other hand, what a hefty pricetag £2100 is in the era of widespread skintness in which we currently find ourselves. The cost is, of course, a reflection of the large number of optional extras applied to the instrument. If you're just looking for a 'basic' Sandberg which still has all the power you could ever need, you could pick one of several alternative variants for £500 less – so be warned. If you do go for Ida's model, though, you're in for a hell of a treat.


GEAR: AG700
STU BROOKS
#AGUILARFAMILY
aguilar®
AG 700
BARNES & MULLINS
Multiple Winner of
The UK's 'Best Supplier' Award

YAMAHA
TRBX305MGR and TRBX504TBN

Mike Brooks tackles two new offerings from the Yamaha stable at pocket-friendly prices

Guitar Guitar
www.guitarguitar.co.uk

£340 and £426

The Japanese manufacturing behemoths Yamaha produce a plethora of musical instruments, covering all price bands from the ridiculously cheap to the eye-wateringly expensive. To their credit, they rarely rest on their laurels when it comes to the lower end of the bass guitar market, constantly tweaking their designs, coming up with new hardware and electronics and generally keeping things interesting for players. The TRBX range has the looks, features and electronics to appeal to a broad range of the bass-playing public – so how do they perform?

Build Quality

Sturdy, roadworthy build quality is usually a given with Yamaha products, and these basses are no exception. Both feature the same curvaceous body shape with a deep lower cutaway for easy fret access: the front body edge and rear contouring make both basses quite sleek and easy to wear. As expected, the five-string model is heavier due to the extra timber involved, but the difference isn't too pronounced, with both basses balancing well both on and off a strap.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Yamaha TRBX305MGR
Price | £340
Made In | Indonesia
Colour | Mist green
Body | Solid mahogany
Neck | Maple and mahogany (five-piece laminate), 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 43mm
Fingerboard | Rosewood
Frets | 24
Pickups | YGD designed M3 humbuckers
Electronics | Yamaha active two-band EQ
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, two-band EQ (bass/treble), five-position performance EQ switch
Hardware | Black nickel hardware, Yamaha diecast machine heads and toploading bridge
Weight | 4.1kg
Case/gig bag included | No
Left-hand option available | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Highly playable with a seriously good tonal performance
Minus | No mid-EQ
Overall | A highly recommended budget five-string. Buy with confidence

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Yamaha TRBX504TBN
Price | £426
Made In | Indonesia
Colour | Trans brown
Body | Solid mahogany
Neck | Maple and mahogany (five-piece laminate), 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 38mm
Fingerboard | Rosewood
Frets | 24
Pickups | Yamaha H5 (Alnico V) humbucking pickups
Electronics | Yamaha active three-band EQ
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, three-band EQ (bass/middle/treble), active/passive selector switch
Hardware | Black nickel hardware, Yamaha diecast machine heads and toploading bridge
Weight | 3.8kg
Case/gig bag included | No
Left-hand option available | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A solid performer with all the usual Yamaha hallmarks
Minus | A lot of competition at this price
Overall | Definitely worth further investigation

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

Both instruments have a gloss polyurethane coat on the body and a satin polyurethane finish applied to the five-piece laminate necks. Both necks are sleek with no rough patches: 19mm string spacing is a feature of both basses. The narrow, Jazz-like nut width of the four-string makes the string spacing quite tight, whereas the 43mm nut width on the five-string is more comfortable. However, both basses are a joy to get around, as the setups are good with no sharp fret edges that I could find. The shallow D-shaped neck profile of the five-string works well for its increased range, while the four-string is slightly more rounded but no less comfortable.

The hardware on both basses is identical, smoked nickel being the order of the day. The diecast tuners on both basses are adequate, although the four-string had one slightly slack tuner. Both bridges function well and the control sets on both instruments feel sturdy and smooth with a gradual operation. The cheaper five-string has a two-band EQ and a five-position switch – which was a little loose – which calls up EQ presets for solo, finger, flat, pick, slap. These are easily recalled, depending on the music or style you are playing. The four-string model offers a three-band EQ and has a battery level indicator on the control cavity plate, a useful addition.

Sounds & Playability

Yamaha basses have a characteristically powerful tone. Some players regard it as a little clinical and clean, and although both basses do exhibit some of this, neither instrument sounds worse for it. The more expensive four-string has a piano-like tonal quality, especially on the E and A strings, and the string volume is relatively equal across all four strings. The five-string exhibits more of the signature tone that I associate with Yamaha basses, while the low B string performance is solid and throaty with a good response.

In terms of power, projection and resonance, I found the cheaper five-string to have a more pleasing tonal palette, helped in no small way by the EQ selector switch which made calling up specific tones very easy. As the cheaper of the two, I thought the tonal performance might be a little muted or lacking in certain departments, but this bass was having none of it! Although the four-string had a brighter attack and more presence in its fundamental tone, the five-string was warmer with a broader sustain across all five strings.

The EQ on both basses was useful and colourful without being particularly excessive. The mid-EQ on the four-string added some extra bite and projection, and although the five-string would probably have benefited from this, the selector switch won hands down. Whether you are looking for your first bass, a backup instrument or just a new squeeze, both of these basses would suit you well in most musical areas.

Conclusion

So what can we deduce from our experience? Well, at these prices, both basses perform very highly. As production models, they tick all the boxes you would expect: although they lack some of the finesse and fine detail you would expect on more expensive basses, take a look at the pricetags and see how far they punch above their weight. Comfort, playability and tone are all there: for our money, the five-string is the standout instrument of the two – and at £340, you really can't go wrong. Enjoy!

“IT WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY, SGT. PEPPER TAUGHT THE BAND TO PLAY”

Celebrate 50 years of The Beatles’ iconic album with this commemorative bookazine. Featuring hundreds of amazing quotes and photos, this is the story of the band, and the record, that changed the world.

ON SALE NOW

Future

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

MARKBASS
EVO 1

Kev Sanders owns the catwalk with the EVO 1, the latest modelling amp from Markbass

MSL Pro
www.mslpro.co.uk

£759

Markbass have never been a company to rest on their laurels. They always seem willing to push the boundaries of design and technology, and when the Markbass Multiamp was released in 2013 we loved it. In my review in *BGM99*, I concluded that many players would love the power, versatility and functions of the Multiamp, but they might not be so keen on the time spent squinting into the small blue LED screen and twiddling all those knobs and buttons to find a sound.

Bearing all that in mind, this new EVO 1 head could be just what many players are looking for; a powerful modelling-type amp with all the versatility of the Multiamp – but also one that's really straightforward to use.

Part of the reason that the EVO 1 seems less daunting is the familiar two-channel layout. There's no screen, either. In fact you could just take it out of its box, plonk it on top of your speakers, cable up and dial in a great bass sound featuring your favourite amp head and effect within seconds. This is exactly what I did.

Here's what's on offer. Next to the 'Aux In' for plugging in your laptop or phone is a selector switch, allowing you to choose one of six pre-set amp models. A glance through the manual reveals that these have names like 'T-Green90' and 'Sunny US'. For bass geeks like us, these are fairly easy to decipher – Trace Elliot and Sunn in these cases – although oddly the amps they represent are listed in the manual anyway, which makes you wonder why Markbass bother

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £759
Made in | Indonesia (assembly)
Power | (MPT Power Amp) 500W RMS @ 4 ohms, 300W RMS @ 8 ohms
Features | Two channels, each with 6 amp models: Channel 1, Little Mark III, T-Green 90 (Trace Elliot GP12) RB700 (G&K RB700) Blue '70 (Ampeg SVT) TTE500, Sunny US (Sunn); Channel 2, B-Drive 21 (Sansamp), Red '96 (SWR Redhead), Blue '70 Plus (Ampeg SVT), Bassface '59 US (Fender Bassman), UK 120 (Vox) J Mayor (Marshall). Each channel has Gain, Lo, Mid and Hi EQ, Level, FX Level, Master Volume, Channel select switch and mix control, Aux in, two effects loops, 2 x XLR line out with Pre/Post Mix and Ground lift, 1 x Speakon, 2 x ¼" jack speaker outs, Headphone in with volume, Tuner with mute function, MIDI input for foot controller (£119 extra)
Weight | 3.2kg

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Modelling amps for bassists don't come much easier to use, or better-sounding, than this
Minus | No display, so you need to remember which amp models and FX combinations are stored where
Overall | The EVO 1 could well be the amp that takes bass modelling into the mainstream

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	■■■■■■■■□□
SOUND QUALITY	■■■■■■■■■□
VALUE	■■■■■■■■□□

"THIS NEW EVO 1 HEAD COULD BE JUST WHAT MANY PLAYERS ARE LOOKING FOR; A POWERFUL MODELLING-TYPE AMP WITH ALL THE VERSATILITY OF THE MULTIAMP — BUT ALSO ONE THAT'S REALLY STRAIGHTFORWARD TO USE"

"AS WELL AS THE OCTAVE AND CHORUS, THERE'S A COMPRESSOR, ENVELOPE FILTER, REVERB AND DELAY, ALL WITH PARAMETERS YOU CAN TWEAK TO GET THEM SOUNDING JUST AS YOU WISH"

with the 'cryptic' names. Anyway, these are incredibly accurate representations of the original amps' sounds: it's great fun switching between them and comparing sounds on the fly.

Once you've chosen your amp for Channel 1, you can move on to setting the gain and the EQ. This is fairly simple as you only have three bands, Low, Mid and High, but they have well-chosen centres and a powerful plus or minus 16db of gain. After the EQ is the Level control followed by the Effects level for Channel 1, with its own status LED. Lastly is the Master Volume and a headphone jack with its own volume control – most welcome.

Channel 2 pretty much replicates channel one. There's the same six-way amp model selector – albeit with six different amp models – the same gain, EQ and level controls for volume and FX. Also on the top row we have a 'mix' control that allows you to blend your two chosen amps, and there's a micro-toggle switch for choosing between either or both channels and a Tuner button which mutes your signal when switched in. On the back there are two separate balanced line outputs and two effects loops, as well as Speakon/jack outputs and the USB and MIDI in port for the optional footswitch.

In use, the EVO 1 couldn't be easier; just select your amp, adjust your EQ and you're good to go. Out of the box you have access to 12 different amp models, but only two options for effects. Channel 1 has a lovely spacey chorus, while Channel 2 has a meaty octave. Both are very usable, but adjustable only in terms of the amount of effect added to your sound by the dedicated FX level control for each channel.

Two inputs mean you could have two basses running through the amp simultaneously, each with its own EQ and FX. However, for me the real benefit of this setup is being able to choose two different amp and effect combinations and then blending the two as you wish. Imagine a smoothly overdriven Bassman model paired with a punchy, clean amp like the Trace, with a touch of compressor – great stuff!

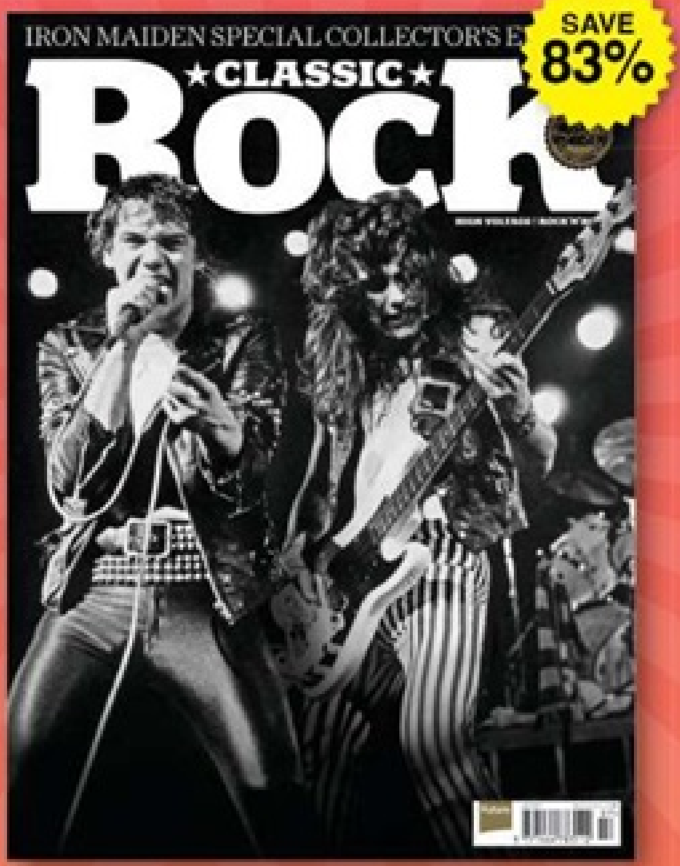
So far, so easy, but it would be a shame not to take advantage of all the other effects and amp models available when you connect the EVO 1 to your computer and use the dedicated software. Once done, you can really start to see the potential of this amp. By choosing from simple dropdown menus, you can select from dozens of different amp models and apply any of six different effects. As well as the Octave and Chorus already mentioned, there's a compressor, envelope filter, reverb and delay, all with parameters you can tweak to get them sounding just as you wish.

I loved this amp. It's a real gigging tool, and it's so easy to edit your sound on the go. Although it 'only' pushes out about 300 watts into an 8 ohm cab, the MPT (Mark Propriety Technology) class D power amp design gives plenty of headroom and more clean volume than you'll probably ever need.

SUMMER SALE!

TRY 5 ISSUES FOR £5*

BIG SAVINGS ON OUR BEST-SELLING MAGAZINES



For great savings on all of our magazines, see the entire range online

myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/summer17

Hotline **0344 848 2852**

***TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** The trial offer is for new UK print subscribers paying by Direct Debit only. Savings are compared to buying full priced print issues. You can write to us or call us to cancel your subscription within 14 days of purchase. Payment is non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. Your statutory rights are not affected. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. Full details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available upon request. UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed line numbers (starting 01 or 02) or are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances (if offered by your phone tariff). For full terms and conditions please visit: bit.ly/magtandc . Offer ends 31 August 2017

BASS TUITION

Making you a better bass player

Welcome to our redesigned tuition section, in which *Bass Guitar Magazine* collates the wit and wisdom of the *crème de la crème* of the electric and upright bass world. We're fortunate enough to have some serious talent on the team, from world-class music educators to experienced touring musicians, who between them have laid down the low notes in every studio, club and arena in the civilised world. Note that we've divided the columns according to Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced level for easy reference. Whether you're looking to improve your playing technique, expand your awareness of theory, set up your rig to sound like your particular bass hero or simply get on a bus and tour, we provide the answers you need here. What are you waiting for? Dive in...
Joel McIver, editor

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here!
Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across 17 years of touring, and 42 solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for over two decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?
www.stevelawson.net

STEVE LAWSON

Beginners **74**

Now you're rolling with theory and techniques, it's time to hit the next level
Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer and transcriber since 2002 and has worked in almost every conceivable musical situation – function bands, cruise ship gigs, theatre shows and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with legendary Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer and has worked for BGM since its first issue. Since 2007 Stuart has worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol, where he continues to teach all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for legendary bassists such as Mark King, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm, Bernard Edwards, Stuart Zender and John Entwistle, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

STUART CLAYTON

Intermediate **78**

Take the bass world by storm with the ultimate tuition section
Philip Mann studied at Basstech, completing the London College of Music's bachelor's degree programme, secured a master's degree in performance and receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. He then established himself as a busy electric and double bassist. Endorsed by Overwater and Vanderkley, he has appeared in London's West End and across Europe on many productions. His performance and session credits include recording at the legendary Sun Studios in Memphis, and working with Greek fusion guitarist Tolis Zavaliaris and the Big Band Metheny ensemble. He has featured as a solo demonstration artist at the London Bass Guitar Show every year from 2012. Currently, he is a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School of Music and lectures for Scott's Bass Lessons.

PHIL MANN

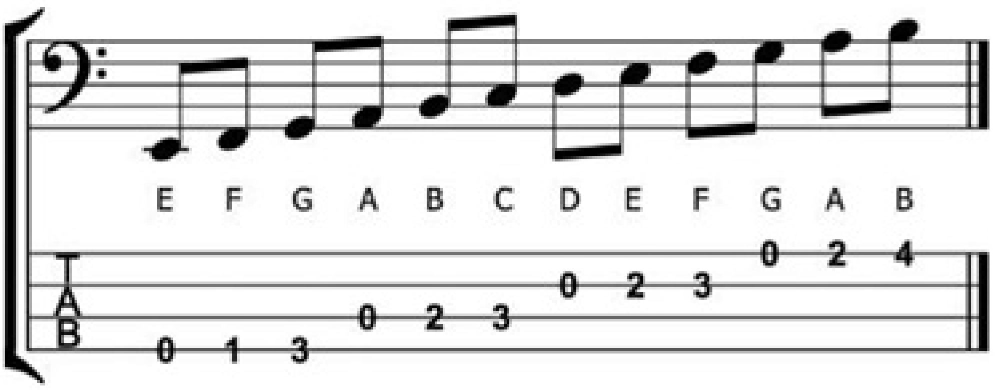
Advanced **84**

BGM Notation Legend

The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in *Bass Guitar Magazine*

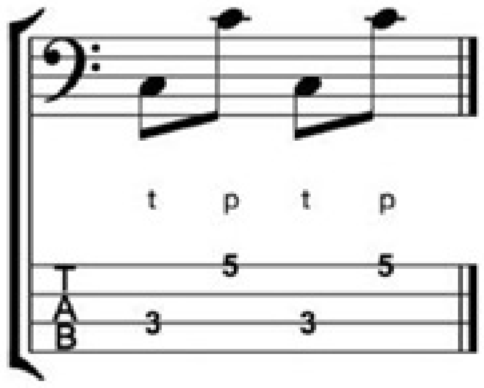
The Stave: most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.

Tablature: this is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.

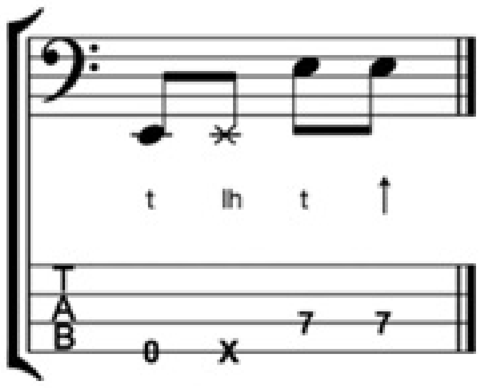


Notes shown in brackets indicate that a note has been tied over from a previous bar.

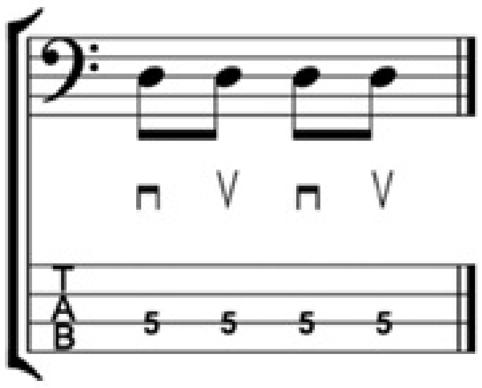
PLAYING TECHNIQUES



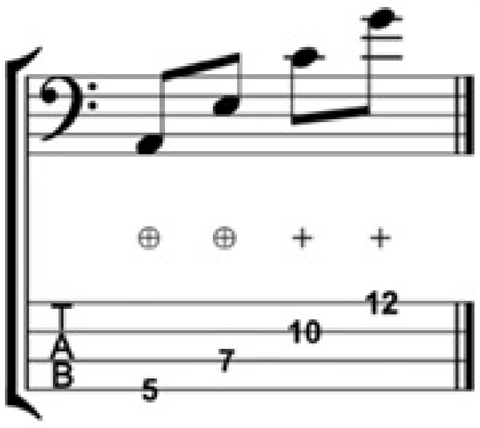
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE
Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a 't', notes popped with the fingers marked with a 'p'



ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE
Fretting hand slaps are marked 'lh' and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow

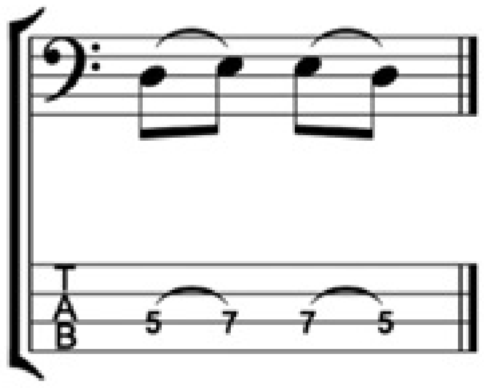


PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up)

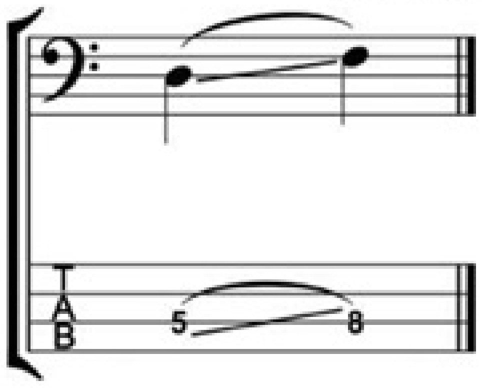


TAPPING TECHNIQUES
Fretting hand taps are shown with a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are shown with '+'. Specific fingers will be shown with numbers if necessary

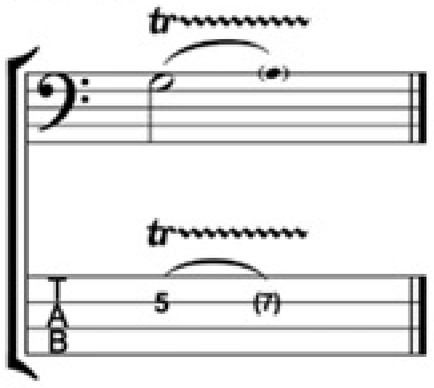
FRETTING TECHNIQUES



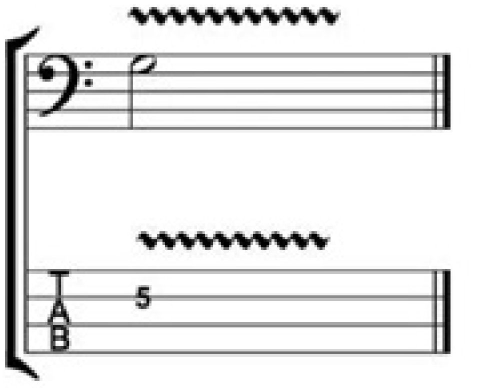
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF
Hammer-ons and pull-offs are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand



SLIDE (GLISSANDO)
Slides are performed by playing the first note then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note

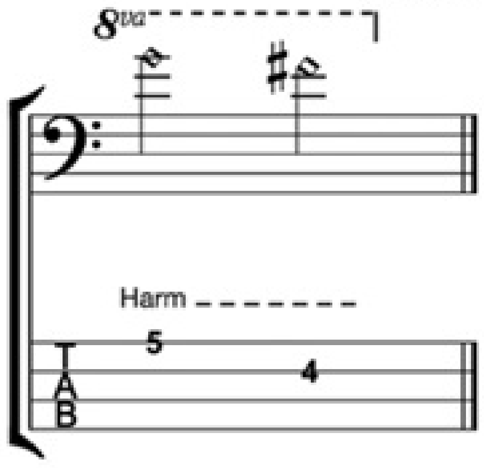


TRILLS
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown using hammer-ons and pull-offs

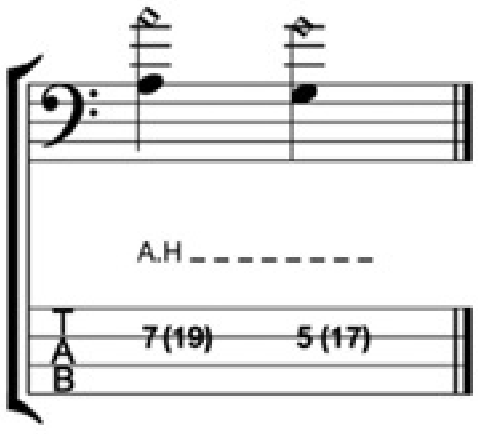


VIBRATO
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger

PLAYING HARMONICS

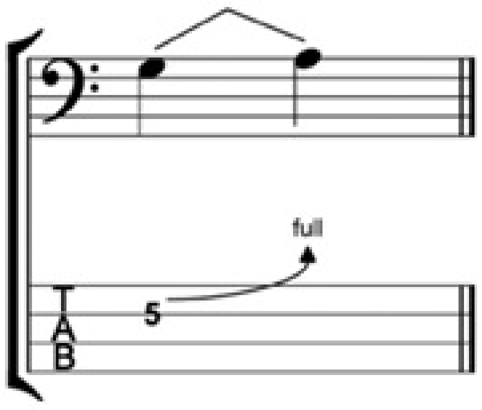


NATURAL HARMONICS
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated

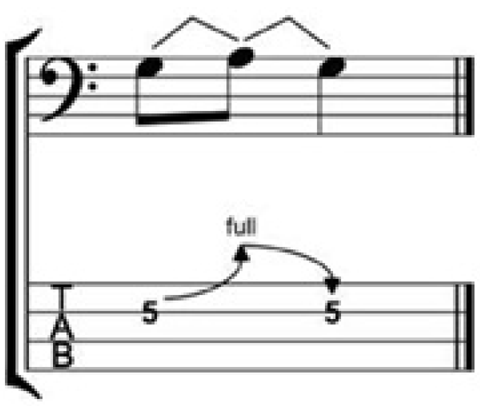


ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS
Pluck the string while fretting the lower note and placing the edge of the picking hand thumb an octave higher (the note shown in brackets)

BENDING NOTES



BEND
The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ = semitone, full = tone



BEND AND RELEASE
The note is bent up to the interval indicated then released back to its original pitch

THE FRONT LINE

Want to make it as a professional bassist? Listen up as BGM's world-class bass team reports back from the tourbus

THE JAZZ BASSIST

RUTH GOLLER

Digesting the big, big noises with jazz maestro Ruth

The other day I had the great pleasure of seeing the band Zu perform live. They're an instrumental trio from Italy and are best described as a mixture of heavy metal, rock, jazz and noisecore: seeing them play live was an inspiring – and very full-on – experience. I'm a big fan of Massimo Pupillo, who plays electric bass with the band. He's a brilliant, versatile musician who moves in the same musical circles as I do, which is why I feel an affinity with his playing. His sound, playing heavy rock and metal, is overwhelming and his sonic spectrum is vast. He has everything you would want from a metal bass player, but he also plays with free jazz musicians such as Peter Broetzmann, Paal Nilssen Love and Mats Gustafsson. These two styles might differ in form, in the sense that heavy metal is usually a lot more worked out and performed as it is rehearsed, and free jazz on the other side is completely improvised and open in form: however, I feel they can have the same level of intensity and energy. For example, I grew up listening to punk and hardcore music and later got into jazz by listening to John Coltrane. I could really relate to the intensity I heard coming from his playing: it somehow reminded me of punk music. Obviously the instrumentation and sounds of each are very different, but energetically they are the same to me. I hear this kind of intensity in Massimo's playing and the choice of his sounds. In Zu there is no guitarist, so he covers both roles – and he does it brilliantly. He often plays chordally and uses a lot of distortion, but he never loses the bottom end – and although he plays a lot of double stops you never get the impression that his sound is muddy or unfocused. He obviously knows how to control his pedalboard really well. I had to stop myself from going up after the gig and inspecting it. It was inspiring to see someone use gear in such a creative way to serve the music, rather than using technique or effects for the sake of it.

www.ruthgoller.com

THE METALHEAD

MIKE POGGIONE

New bug Mike from Monstrosity says hi

Hello everyone! I play bass in Monstrosity, Vile, Capharnaum and many other bands, and I'm delighted to take over the Metalhead column in *BGM* from my buddy Ivan Munguia. Let's begin by investigating multiple right-hand fingering styles in order to achieve increased speed, endurance and precision, all while using proper technique. These techniques will give you the ability to set yourself above and beyond the majority of bass players, at least in the extreme metal scene!

The basic abbreviations for right-hand fingering patterns are P (pinkie, or little finger), R (ring finger), M (middle finger) and I (index finger). I'm assuming that your right hand will be your picking hand, but it can be notated in the same way if you're using your left hand.

To obtain 16th notes, MIMI is the basic technique used by most players. Another popular technique consists of three fingers, with accents on the bracketed strokes: (R)MIR, (M)IRM, (I)RMI and (R)MIR. The brackets refers to the use of increased attack to accent a particular string: it's very important to make sure that you attack those particular strokes with increased accents, or you'll end up with the sound of normal three-finger triplets! Alex Webster, Jeff Hughell and Billy Sheehan are just three amazing players who use this fingering technique to achieve intense picking speed. Another way to increase speed for 16th notes is simply to repeat (R)MIM. This picking technique feels rather odd to me but it's something I've been working on.

I also enjoy using a four-finger technique, (P)RMI. This can be a bit difficult because most players struggle to reach the string with their little finger, and lack the ability to attack the string strongly enough, but it's still possible to achieve. Jason Blachowicz from Malevolent Creation is well known for using this technique.

See you here next month for more fingerstyle patterns!

www.monstrosity.us

THE ALTERNATIVE ROCKER

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN

Practice makes perfect, advises Therapy? bassist Mike

© www.ashleybird.com

Band rehearsal can be a polarising experience for musicians, with neither the visceral thrills of live performance nor the creative rewards of a studio session. I know quite a few players who cite it as their least favourite part of being in a group, but personally I'm a big fan of rehearsal, especially when it comes to working on new material. It's great to get in at that ground level where anything is possible with a song and every tune has the potential to morph into something special.

I suppose one of the main factors in how a rehearsal should run is what sort of state the raw material being worked on is in. If there's a main songwriter who has very precise ideas about how the songs and other instrumentation should sound, then it's more a case of working within what they feel goes with their original vision. If the musical ideas are presented in a less precious way, then it all opens up a bit and can provide more opportunities for players to put their individual stamp on it. Neither way is easier or better: sometimes it's challenging to work within a rigid remit, while at other times it's great not to feel that your playing has to be curtailed to fit into a certain format or template.

From a bass point of view I like to have my homework done well in advance, so I have at least a basic idea of the chords, melodies, beats and arrangement. Sometimes even a quick musical sketch recorded on a phone can be a good enough heads-up as to where a song's intent lies. Once you have those fundamental parts down, that will make your rehearsal session more straightforward, less stressful and an overall more productive experience. Listen to the drummer carefully, as this can be key to helping refine bass parts: be sure to focus on the dynamics and transitions that can take a song down a different, exciting route.

Don't be scared to jam around a bit, if the environment and time scale permits. This is a bit of a golden zone where you can go off and stumble across great parts and features you might not otherwise find. I'm a firm believer that when you stop concentrating on playing, and move onto *enjoying* playing, that's where you'll be at your most creative. The songs will really benefit from this.

www.therapyquestionmark.co.uk

THE EXTENDED-RANGE SPECIALIST

STEWART MCKINSEY

Silence when 10-string warlock McKinsey speaks to you

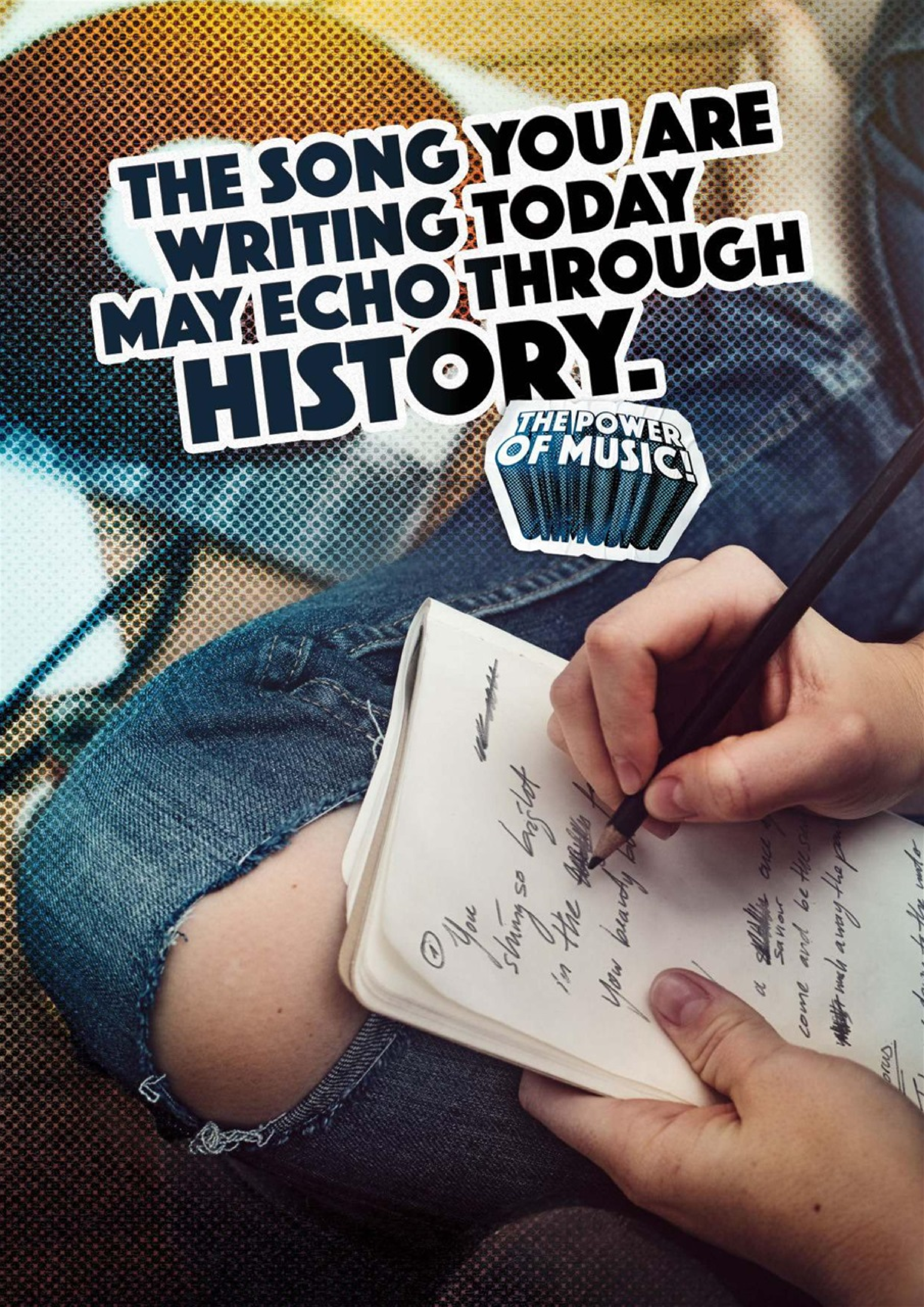
This month I'd like to ponder one of the most important elements of music: silence. The space between notes adds power to them and also humanises what you play. Leaving room in what you play for that 'nothing' is one of the things that defines you as an artist, as much as your note choice or the instrument you play.

A friend who is mathematically inclined and more prone to logic than passion came to me one day and, with an absolutely straight face, told me that there is no way to make a sixteenth-note bass-line groove. I looked at him for a moment and then told him we were going to listen to 'What Is Hip' by Tower Of Power, a classic funk line. ToP's Rocco Prestia is an absolute force, and that line is most definitely a sixteenth note oeuvre. While the insistent verse feel is what most people hear, listen to this tune and find where Rocco *didn't* play. Whether it's the syncopation in the choruses or the undeniable funk in the bridge, the silence in the piece says as much – if not more – than the notes.

I'm a huge fan of Michael Hedges, who changed how to play (and even approach playing) the acoustic guitar: no small feat. While his technical wizardry amazes me, I also adore his composition style. As an absolute virtuoso at a time when people were shredding neoclassical guitar and bringing the harmonic minor scale to an audience that wasn't really aware of it, Michael brought tunes like 'Silent Anticipations' and 'Lenono' to the world, full of beautiful silence and rife with space. His ability to create new sonorities and introduce non-guitar elements to what he did would not have had even a portion of the impact it did – and does – if he did not let the music breathe, which it does, beautifully.

With all our strings and frets, the extended range bass makes sound wonderfully. Keeping it quiet, both in terms of muting and as a reflection of our ego, is a challenge and it's one I invite you to take up. You've worked so much on what you play: now it's time to flip that coin and appreciate how to say more with less. Amaze your audience by *not* playing.

www.facebook.com + search 'Stewart McKinsey'


THE SONG YOU ARE WRITING TODAY MAY ECHO THROUGH HISTORY.
THE POWER OF MUSIC!

thomann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

STEVE LAWSON

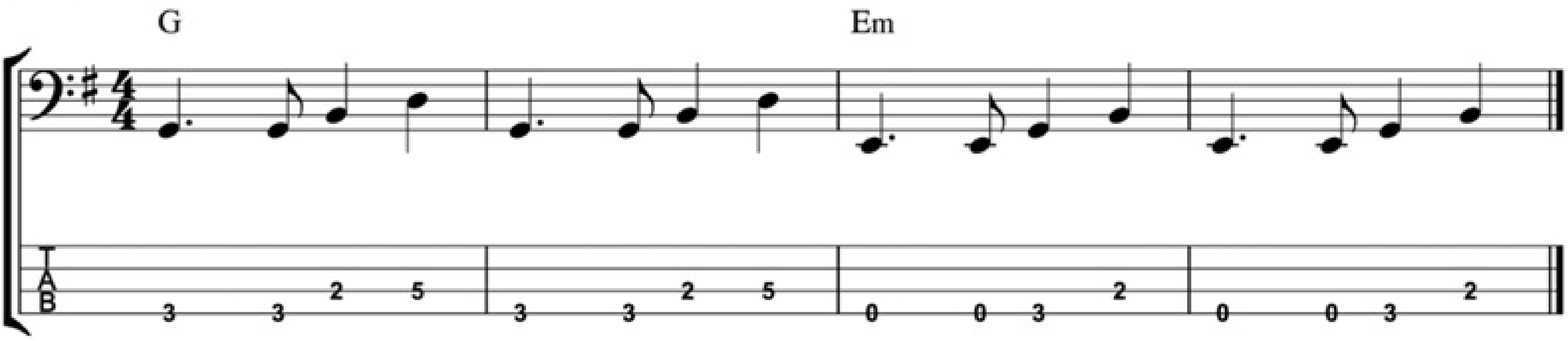
Beginners' Tutorial

Starting out on bass? You're in good hands with the great Steve Lawson. Let the journey begin!

Welcome back! Let's have a quick recap of last month's lesson. We were looking at creating a bass-line over a two-chord progression, and learning how we could use the notes in the chord (the root, third and fifth) to connect the underlying rhythm to the harmony. That's the single most common role that the bass guitar plays in pretty much every form of pop music. Linking the notes in the chord to the rhythm that the drums are playing. We are the glue!

The two chords we were using were G major and E minor, and we noticed that they both have a G and a B in them, so we were able to create some interesting lines moving between them, making sure that each change of chord began with the root in the bass.

EXAMPLE 1

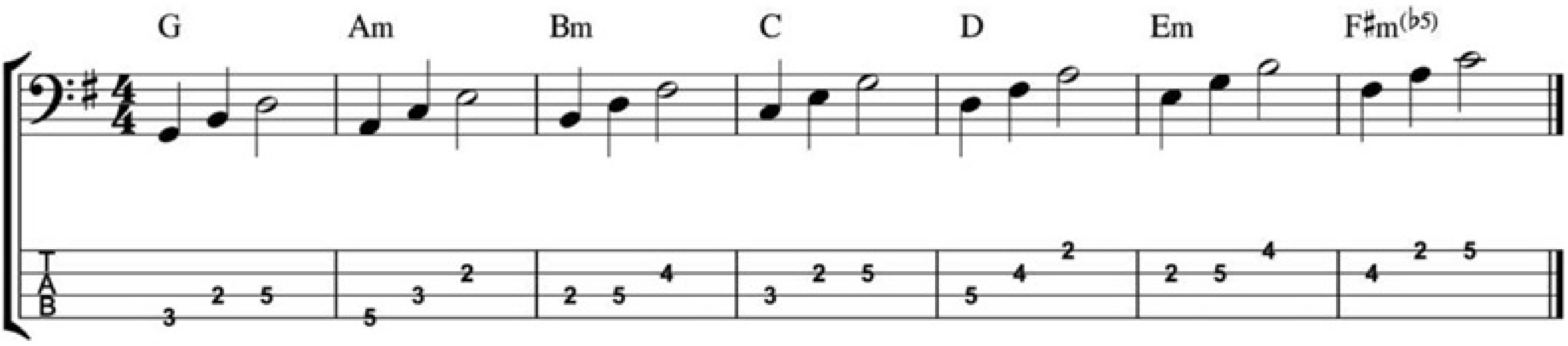


This month we're going to add a second section to our song. This is going to be another two-chord section, but first we'll take a slight detour and have a think about how we arrive at a set of chords for any given major key.

The process is pretty simple: starting on each note of the scale, we play the next two alternate notes in the sequence, and those are the third and fifth of the chord. The template we used last month to find out whether a chord was major or minor (three semitones between the root and third for a minor chord, four semitones between them for a major chord) will then tell us whether the chords are major or minor.

We're in the key of G major at the moment, which has the following notes: G, A, B, C, D, E and F#. We'd normally add a G on the top to complete a one-octave major scale, but we can continue that same sequence in either direction and we're still in the key of G. If we play the alternate notes from G, we get G (miss out A) B, (miss out C) D. G, B, D together form a G major chord – G is the root, B is the third, and D is the fifth. We can repeat that process on each note in the scale. So for A, we get A, C and E, for B we get B, D, F#, C we get C, E, G and so on. The full set looks like this:

EXAMPLE 2



Reaching from the D on the A string to the A on the G string is tricky. If you can't stretch, pivot your hand. Don't strain at it!

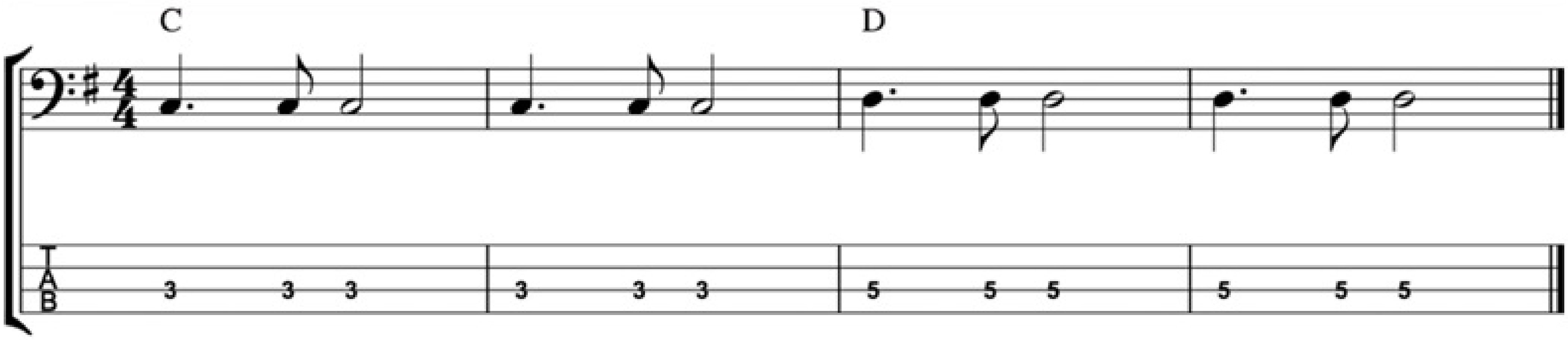
We can play through these as an exercise in their own right. The really tricky ones are the ones where each of the notes are on a different string (A minor and D major), and that's really useful practice, but is a step ahead of what we're working on right now. Feel free to experiment, but don't get downhearted if it feels a bit beyond you. We'll work up to it! The important thing is that we know the formula for working out what the chords are in a key and what the notes are in each of those chords, and then how to play them on our instrument. As the old saying goes, 'Give a bassist a tab book and she'll play for a day; teach her how to work lines out for herself and she'll be playing pub gigs for a lifetime'... or words to that effect!

So onto our second section. This is another two-chord vamp, this time from C major to D major. These are the 'four' and 'five' chords in the the key of G major, most often written in roman numerals as IV and V. The usefulness of knowing their position in the key is that it makes transposing (playing the same song but in a different key) much easier.

By the same token, our first section goes from the 'one' chord to the 'six' chord, or I to VI. Note that upper case roman numerals are used for major chords and lower case ones are used for minor chords. There's a lot of shorthand that goes into how chord progressions are shared between musicians, and it's maddeningly inconsistent – but I'll introduce you to the various conventions as we go along.

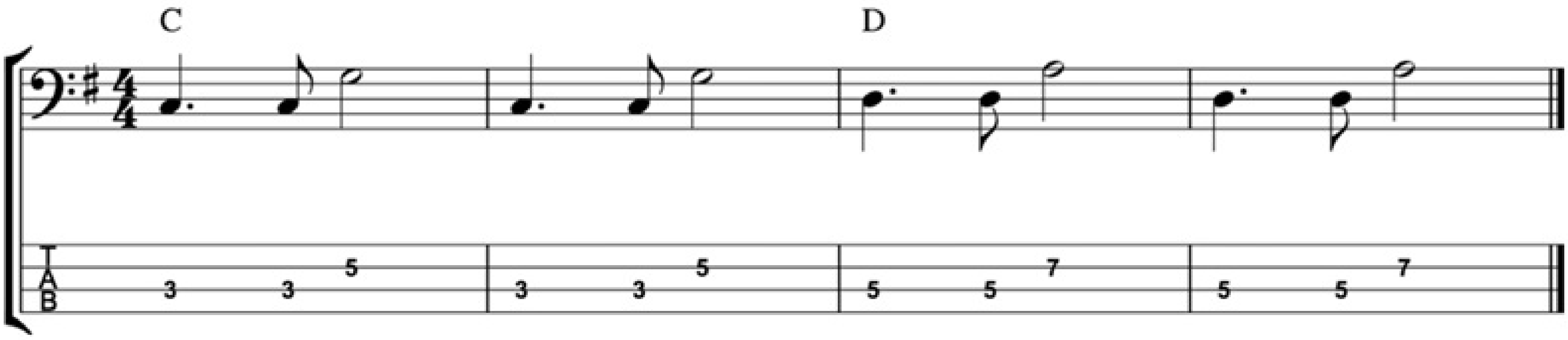
So, applying the same first principles to these two chords as to the first section, we can play the roots like this:

EXAMPLE 3



Then the fifth like this:

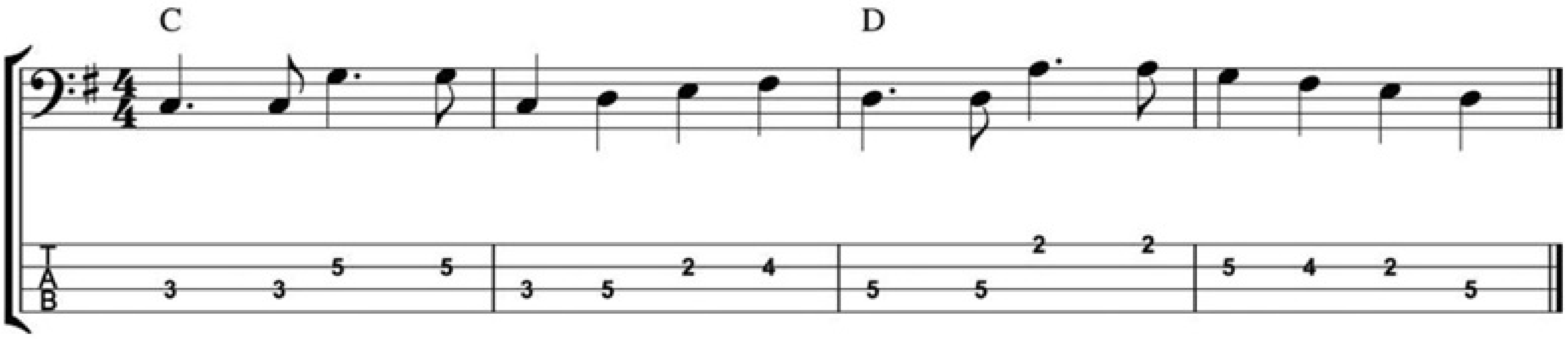
EXAMPLE 4



Alternatively, playing the A on the D string requires a shift of position, but a much smaller stretch

We're going to skip just adding in the third, and introduce a new concept: the idea of a 'walking' bass-line. This is a line where the notes are evenly spaced out and often move up or down following the notes in the key. Here's one possibility:

EXAMPLE 5



With walking lines, we encounter another interesting concept for making bass-lines – the idea of 'strong' and 'weak' beats. In most styles of pop and rock, when we're playing in 4/4, beats one and three are the strong beats and two and four are the weak beats. Mostly, it makes sense to have chord notes on the strong beats to help reinforce the harmony. If you look at the second bar of **Example 5**, you'll see it does just that: beat one is a C which is the root of the chord, and beat three is an E, the third of the chord.

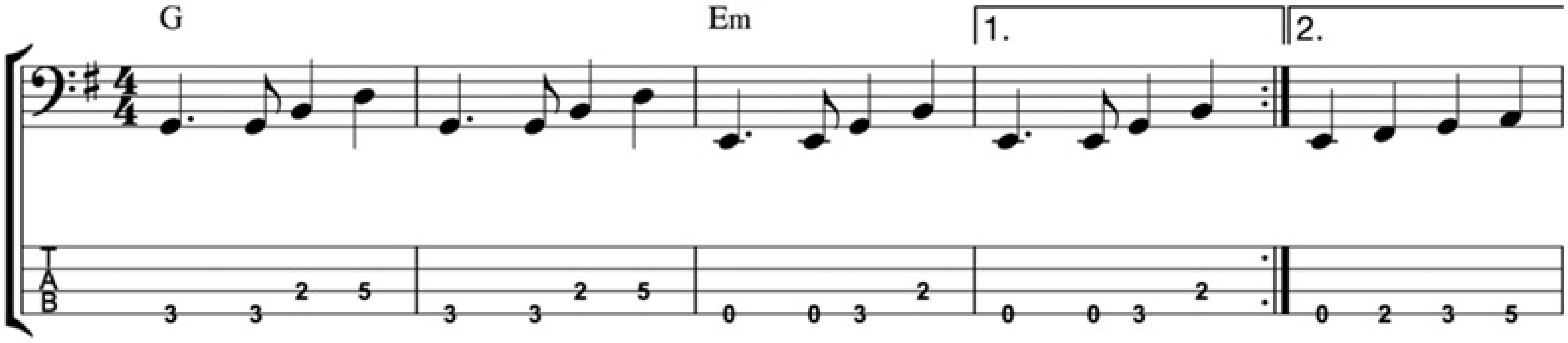
However, the walking line doesn't follow this rule on the way back down, over the D Major chord. Look at bar four. We have a G on beat one – that's a fourth above D, so not one of the notes in our triad – and an E on beat three, which is the second. Here, we have to go back to the 'threefold law' that we talked about right at the start of this series, which suggests there are always three ways to approach any bit of music: how it sounds, how it is played, and how it is understood and explained.

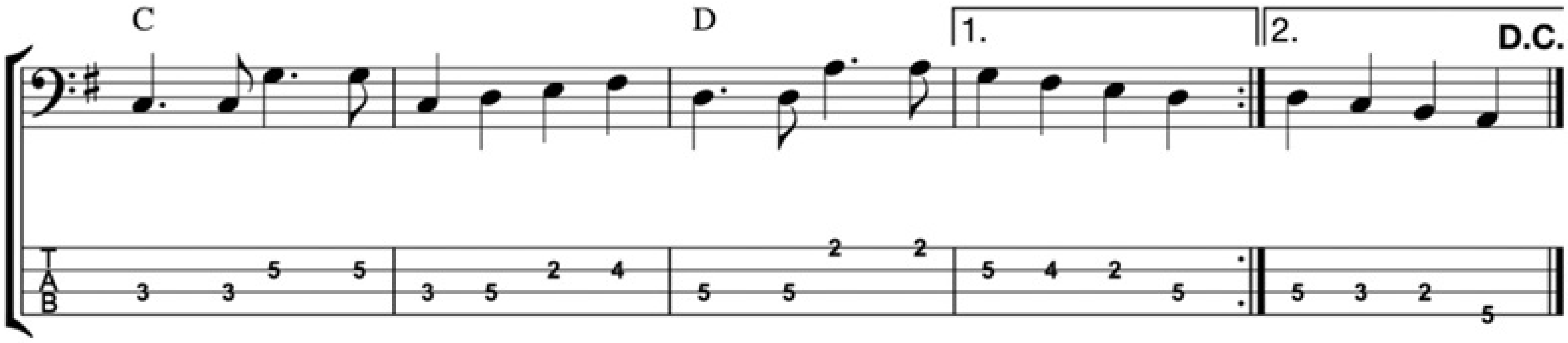
Remember, to quote my friend Graham, music theory is descriptive, not prescriptive. So the 'rules' of how things are put together are more suggestive: they're about the ways things are *commonly* done, not the way they *have* to be done. And there are many, many exceptions to every rule.

Let's put those two parts together, and we'll add in another walking phrase from the first section to the second section. We're also introducing another bit to our reading vocabulary here – the concept of a first and second time bar. We'll repeat each pair of chords, but after the first time you play the first time bar, and after the second time, you play the second time bar, like this:

The F# on the D string can be played with your third or fourth finger. Try both and see which is more comfortable

EXAMPLE 6





We're moving forward in terms of length and complexity here, but that's okay. Just take it slow, and work out ahead of time how the repeats work so you know where you're going. As with last month, ask a friend who plays guitar or keyboards to play the chords along with you – and if you're feeling really brave, try experimenting with different patterns for the walking lines, joining the chords up in interesting ways.

See you soon!

STUART CLAYTON

Intermediate Tutorial

Feeling ready to take the next step? Meet Commander Clayton, your guide through intermediate bass territory. Pick it up!

Welcome to my new series of columns which cover Intermediate level techniques and music theory. In this issue, we'll be embarking on a brand new series, one that will get you up to speed with using a plectrum. Over the course of the next few issues we'll be breaking down the technique and examining how to apply it correctly. Along the way, we'll also be using it to play some rock/pop lines, and eventually building up to some more complex semiquaver-based funk lines.

In my extensive experience as a bass guitar tutor, I've found that the mechanics of good plectrum technique are often given little or no consideration. By this I mean that most young players simply grab a pick and start playing! This is fine, but as with any other technique, not being shown to correct way to apply it at the beginning can lead to bad habits later on. With that in mind, it's a good idea to work through the basics of the technique even if you've been using a pick for a while.

Holding the Plectrum

Most bassists hold the pick between the thumb and tip of the first finger as shown in the photograph – I recommend that you do the same. Aim to have about 3 or 4mm of the pick protruding, but feel free to experiment with this. Be careful not to grip the pick too firmly: if you experience discomfort in your thumb muscle, it is likely that you are gripping it too tightly. Hold it firmly, but not too hard.

Although you may have seen other bassists resting their hand on the bridge or body of the instrument when they play, this is not recommended. You should instead rest your forearm across the contoured top edge of the bass. This will leave your wrist free and allow it a greater range of movement, which you will need. Your hand should be completely free to float above the strings, enabling you to jump from string to string easily. You'll also be free to palm mute in this position, should you need to.

The point at which you strike the strings will have an impact on your tone and technique and should be taken into consideration. If you pick closer to the neck you will find that the strings are looser: the resulting tone will be warm and with plenty of low end. When picking closer to the bridge you will find that the strings have more tension, and therefore the tone at this point will likely be a little thinner, but with more bite. Ideally, you should be adept at picking at different points on the string: this will enable you to alter your tone to suit the musical situation you are in, just with your picking hand.

Choosing a Plectrum

One visit to your local guitar shop and you'll find that when it comes to choosing a plectrum, there's a lot of choice. So which is the right one? No-one can answer this for you: the simple answer is that every bass player will have their own preference. With experimentation, you will come to find yours. The best thing to do is to buy a selection of picks and try them all. I most often use Dunlop Tortex 0.73mm, a relatively thin plectrum with a lot of flexibility. Remember that whatever you choose, it's okay to change your mind from time to time – you don't need to stick with one pick for the rest of your life.

Let's get started with using the pick...

Alternate Picking

Although some bass-lines can be played using only downstrokes, many will be too fast or complex for this to be effective. For this reason, the most efficient way to use a plectrum is to employ down and upstrokes. This is known as **alternate picking**. The best way to apply this technique is to play all downbeats (notes that fall on the beat) with downstrokes and all upbeats (notes that fall in between the beats) with upstrokes – the symbols used for these are shown below. This might sound overly simple, but as you work through the exercises in this series you will see that it is an approach that will eventually allow you to play anything with a pick that you can play with your fingers.

⊓ = downstroke　　　V = upstroke

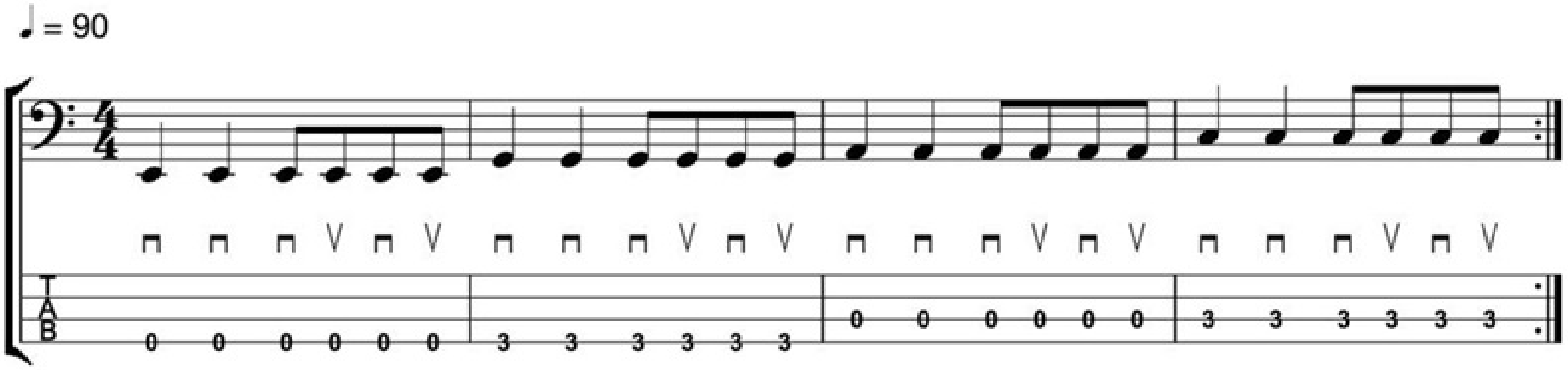
Example 1

Let's start with the simplest of examples. In this exercise, the first two beats of the bar consist only of crotchets. These are downbeats and so are played with downstrokes. The following two beats consist of quavers. The downbeats are still played with downstrokes, but the upbeat notes (which fall on the 'and' of each beat) are played with upstrokes. As you play this exercise, you should aim for an even tone and volume level between your down and upstrokes. Ideally, they should sound identical.

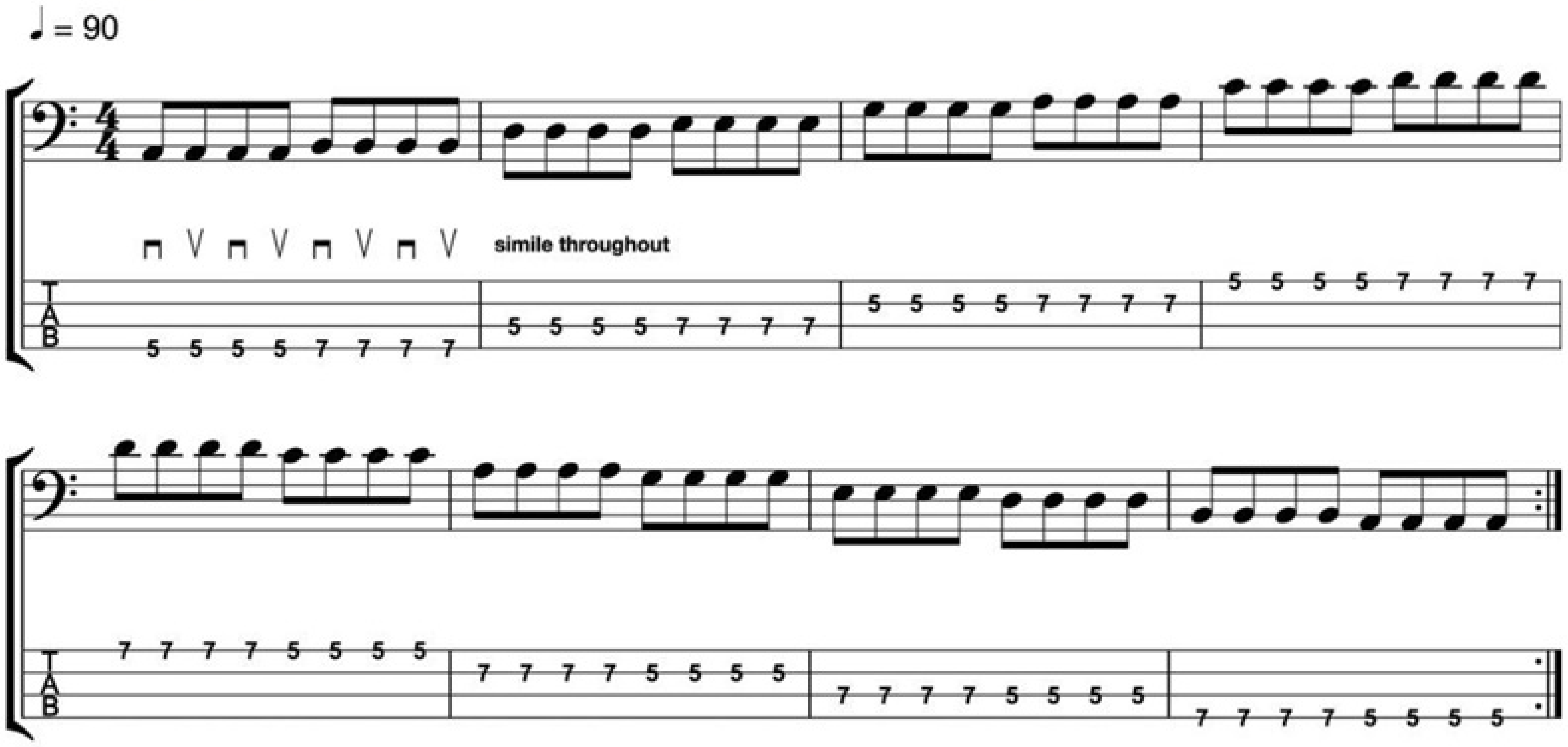
Example 2

Now that you understand the basic principle of alternate picking, you should begin applying the technique to all four strings. This exercise will

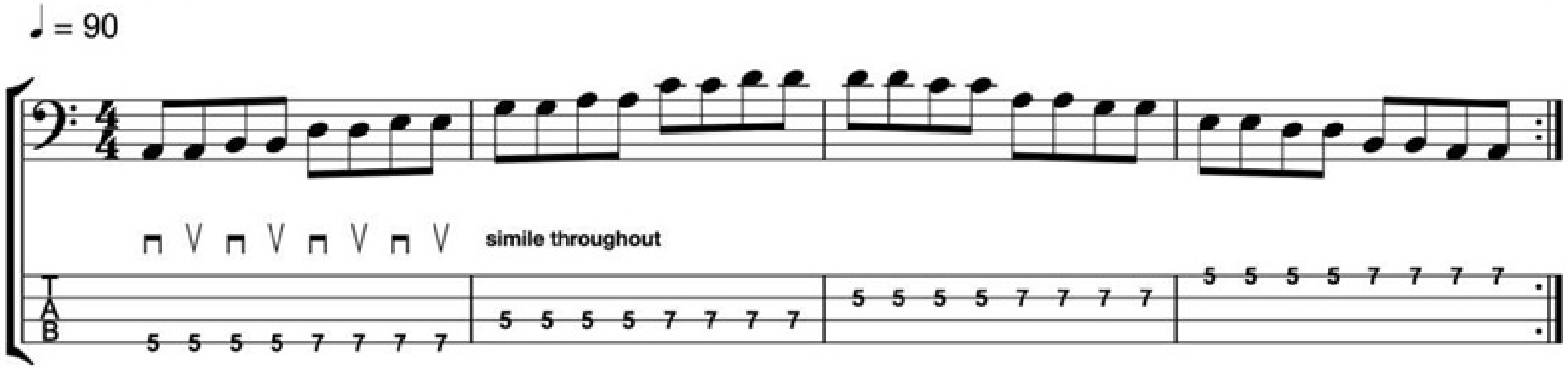
EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



get you started: here, we will play a repeating sequence of notes across all four strings and back again. The notes themselves are kept very simple (limited to those at the fifth and seventh frets only) in order to allow you to focus all of your attention on your picking hand. Remember to aim for an even tone and volume across all strings, whether you are playing downstrokes or upstrokes.

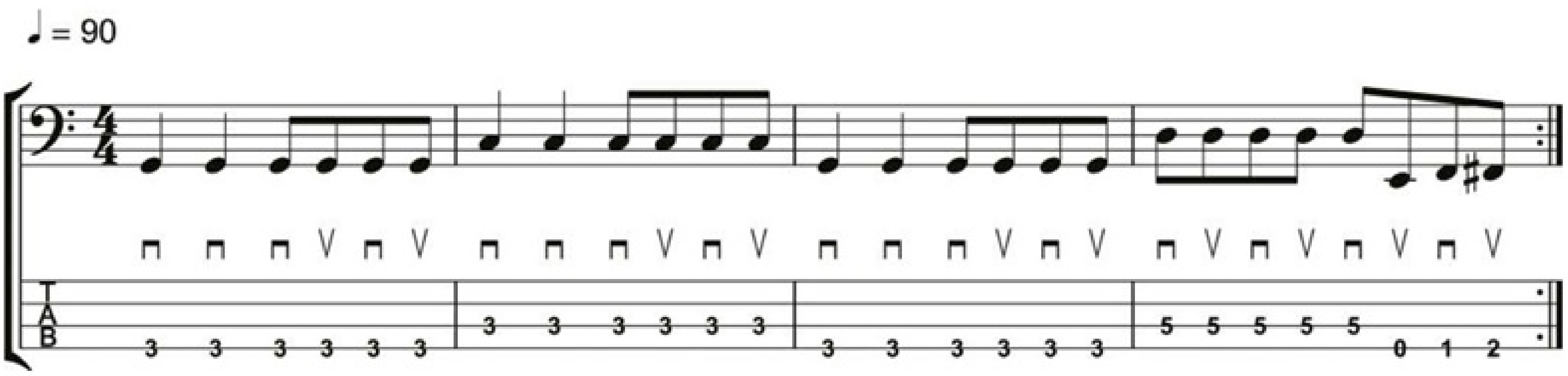
Example 3

In this exercise you are required to cross strings more frequently. Try to keep your picking fluid, with the movement coming from the wrist, not the arm.

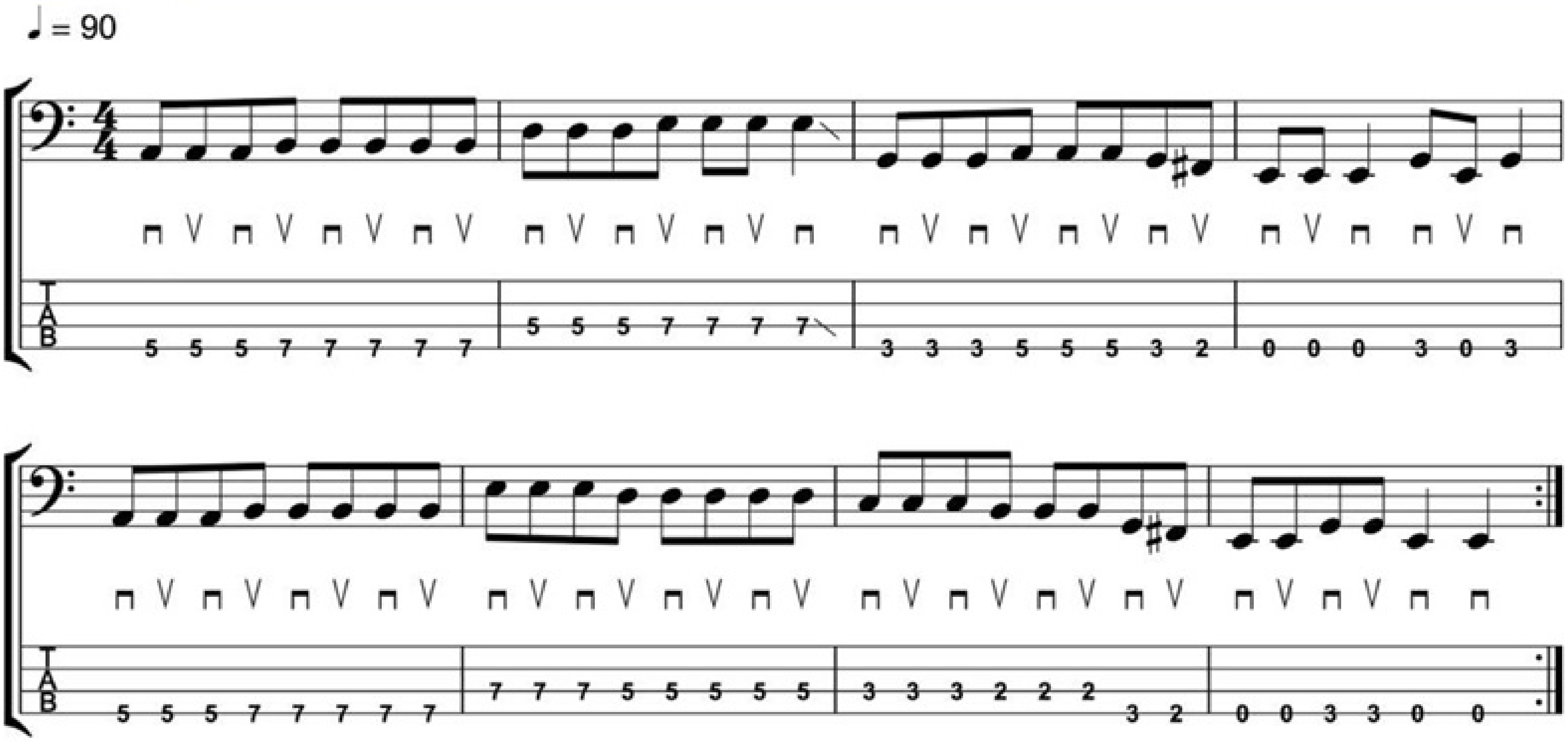
As you will have probably discovered by now, using alternate picking does not mean sticking rigidly to a strict down-up picking sequence. There will be times when you will play two downstrokes in a row, such as when playing longer rhythms such as crotchets, as shown in **Example 1**. Similarly, when playing more complex syncopated rhythms you will sometimes play two upstrokes in a row. The important thing is that downbeats are played with downstrokes and upbeats are played with upstrokes.

With the fundamentals now covered, let's put what we have learned so far to use in some simple bass-lines. Each of the following lines are crotchet and quaver-based, meaning that the picking pattern will remain very simple.

EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



"IN MY EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE AS A BASS GUITAR TUTOR, I'VE FOUND THAT THE MECHANICS OF GOOD PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE ARE OFTEN GIVEN LITTLE OR NO CONSIDERATION"

Example 4

This is a very simple exercise that follows a basic chord progression in the key of G. The majority of the exercise is made up of two crotchets, both of which will be played with downstrokes followed by four quavers, which will be played down-up-down-up. The only bar to watch out for is the fourth, where on the third beat you will play a downstroke on the A-string, followed by an upstroke on the E-string. This is not as difficult as it sounds.

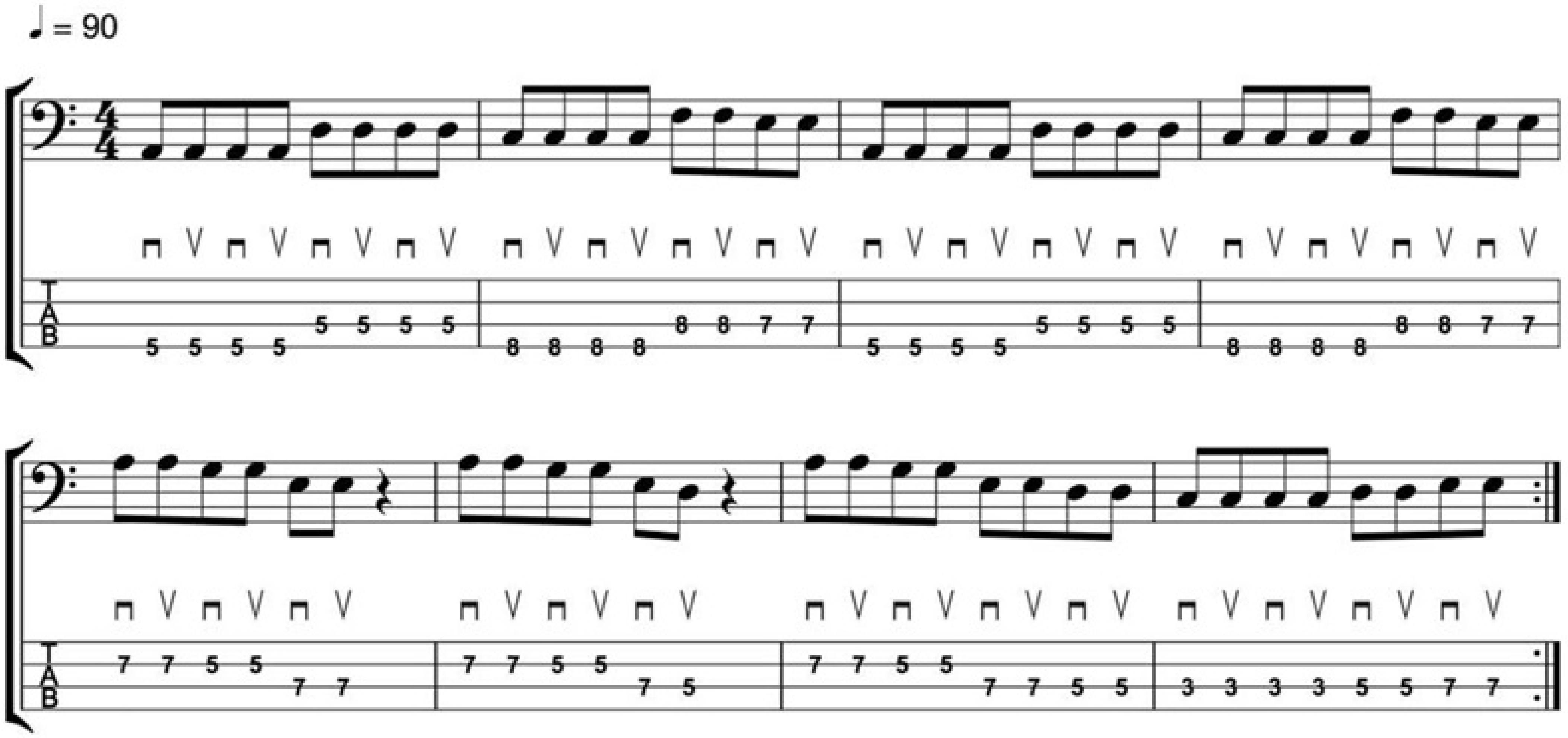
Example 5

This is a simple rock bass-line that uses only the E and A strings. Be careful of the phrase that is used in the first bar: three As are played, then five Bs, meaning that the note changes on the 'and' of beat two. The continuous down-up picking motion should remain the same throughout this bar.

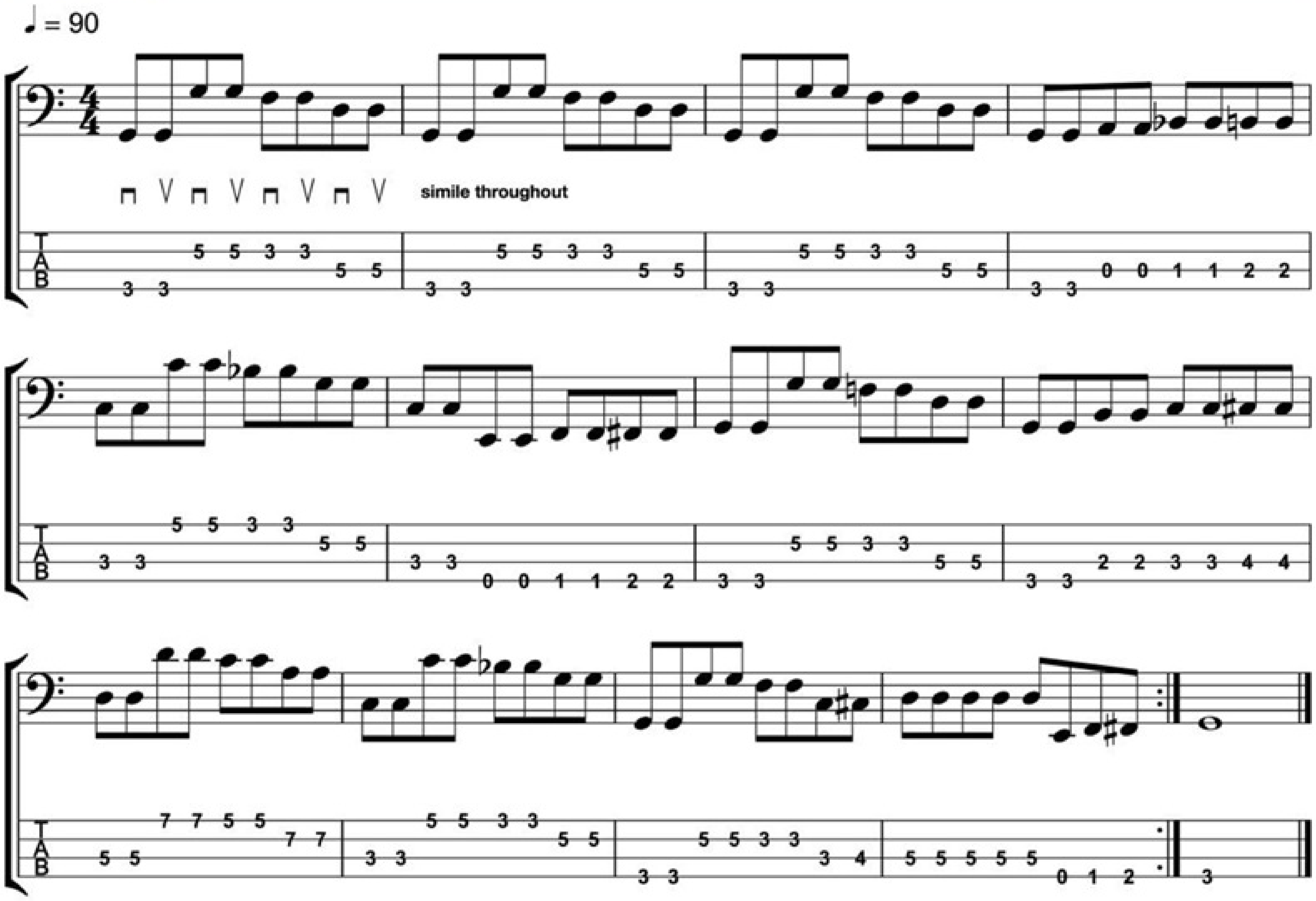
Example 6

This is another simple line that is played on the lower two strings.

EXAMPLE 6



EXAMPLE 7



Example 7

This final exercise is a 12-bar blues progression in the key of G. This line features a little more string crossing, but if you have mastered the exercises in this column so far, it should present no problem for you. This first column in my new series has introduced you to the basics of the alternate picking technique. Next month we will expand on this by tackling some of the challenges that arise from having to cross strings more frequently. Before moving on, it's important that you get the basic content from this lesson under your belt, so practise hard this month and I'll see you in the next issue for the second instalment. Until then...

SUBSCRIBE TO

Bass Guitar Magazine

THE UK'S NUMBER ONE BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

It's easy to subscribe

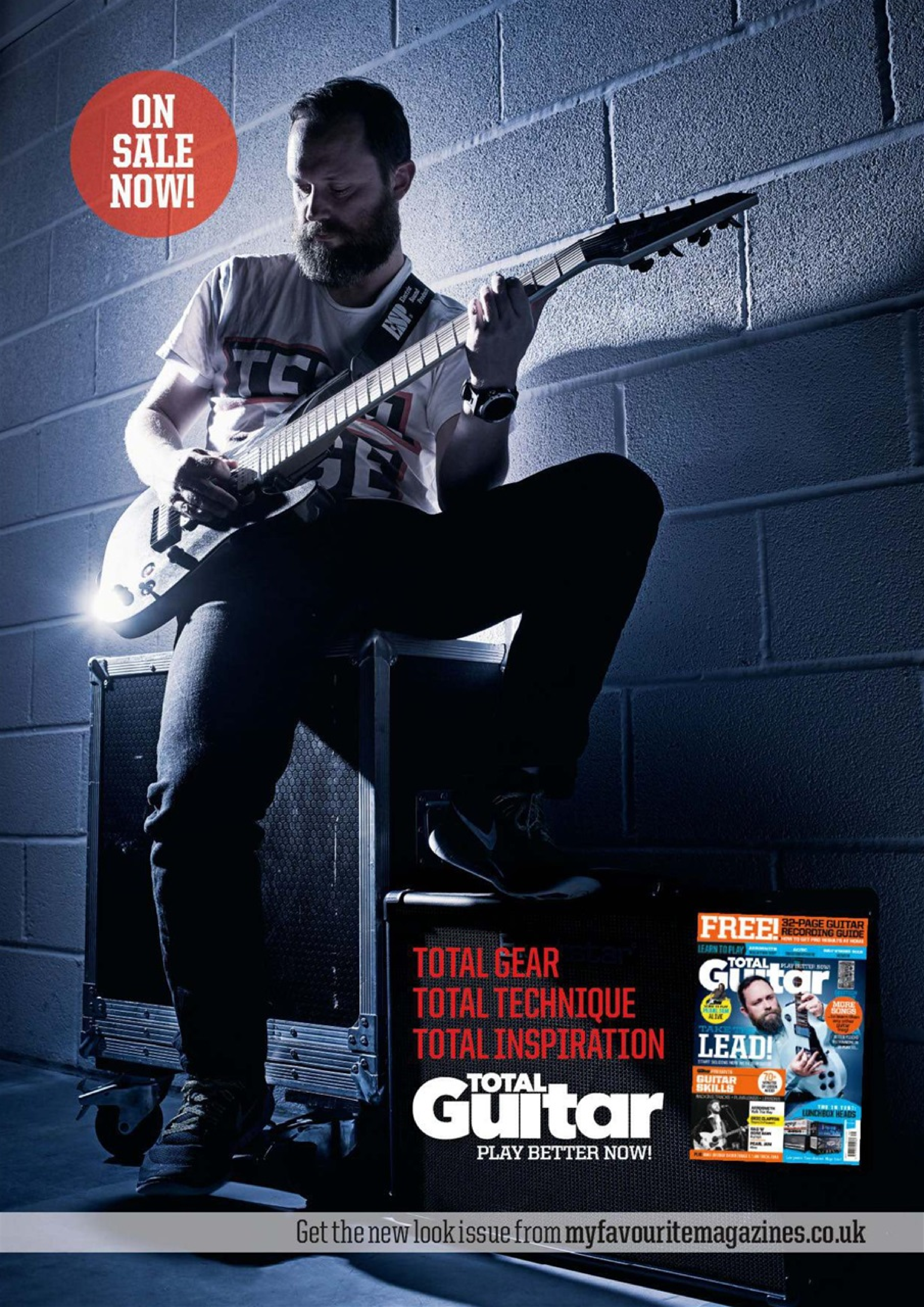
CLICK www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk **CALL** 0344 848 2852 **OVERSEAS** +44 344 848 2852

UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed line numbers (starting 01 or 02) and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowance (if offered by your phone tariff)
Phone lines are open: Mon-Fri: 0800-1900 Sat: 1000-1400 Phone lines are closed Sundays and UK public holidays

HURRY! OFFER ENDS 22/08/2017

***Every 3 months by Direct Debit.**

Prices and savings quoted are compared to buying full-priced print issues. You will receive 13 issues in a year. Your subscription is for the minimum term specified and will expire at the end of the current term. You can write to us or call us to cancel your subscription within 14 days of purchase. Payment is non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. Your statutory rights are not affected. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit: www.bit.ly/magterms. Offer ends 22/08/2017.


ON SALE NOW!
FREE! 32-PAGE GUITAR RECORDING GUIDE
TOTAL Guitar
LEAD!
GUITAR SKILLS
TOTAL GEAR
TOTAL TECHNIQUE
TOTAL INSPIRATION
TOTAL Guitar
PLAY BETTER NOW!
Get the new look issue from myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

PHIL MANN

Advanced Tutorial

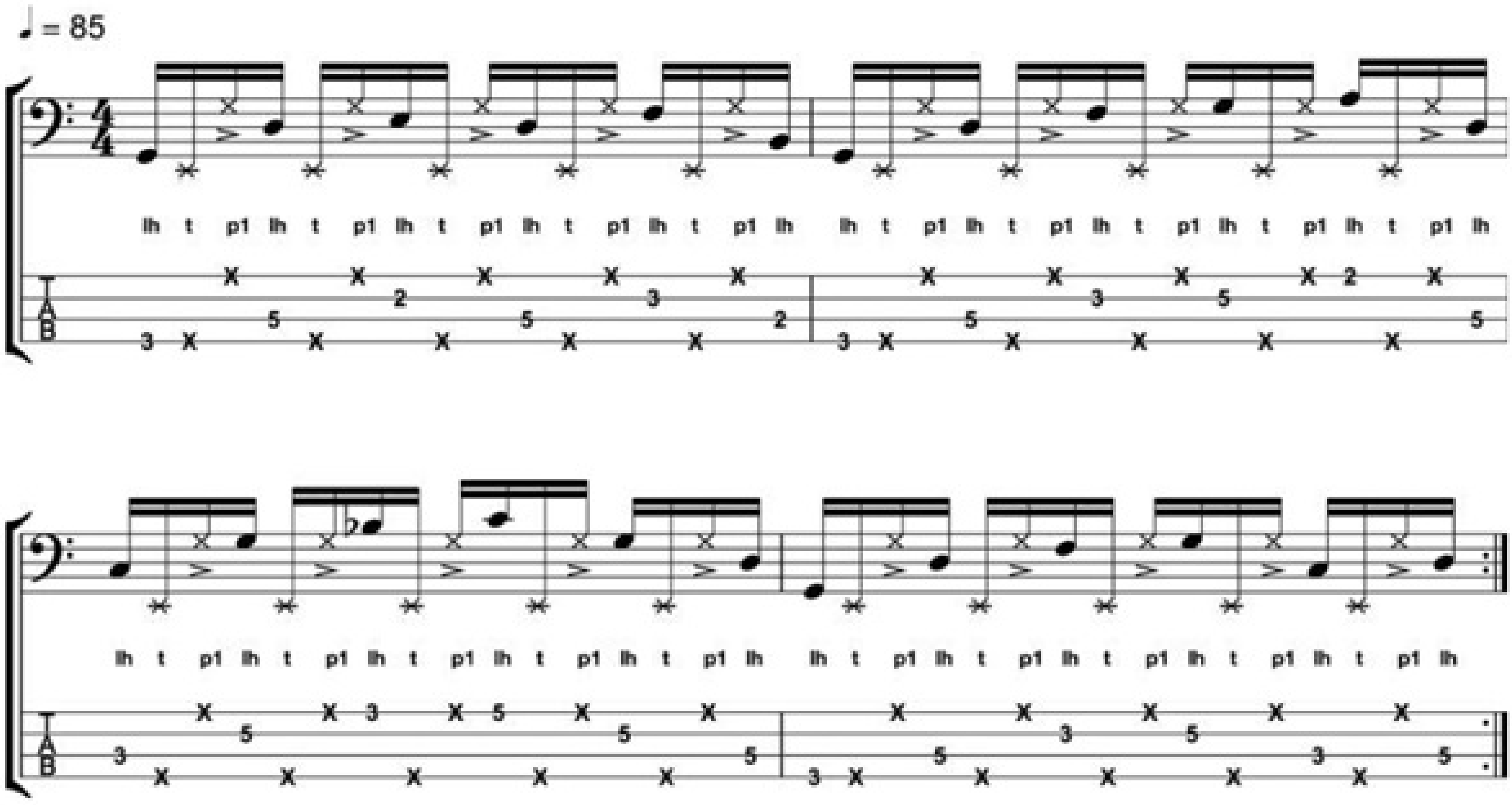
Obi-Wan Mann has got his Jedi chops up for this month's mission into advanced bass tuition. Lightsabers at the ready!

Let's be honest, in order to lust after a monthly magazine dedicated purely to the world of bass guitar, subscribe to a specialised online teaching resource, or even take it to the extreme and give up a year of your life to go to music college, you've got to be some kind of serious music super-geek. Therefore, surely if you taught, contributed or were a visiting faculty member for any or all of the above, you'll be seen as the equivalent to some kind of bass Jedi? If we're in agreement then I hereby declare myself as the newly self-appointed Yoda of low end – and welcome all of you over bass-crazy Padawans to this month's instalment of advanced techniques!

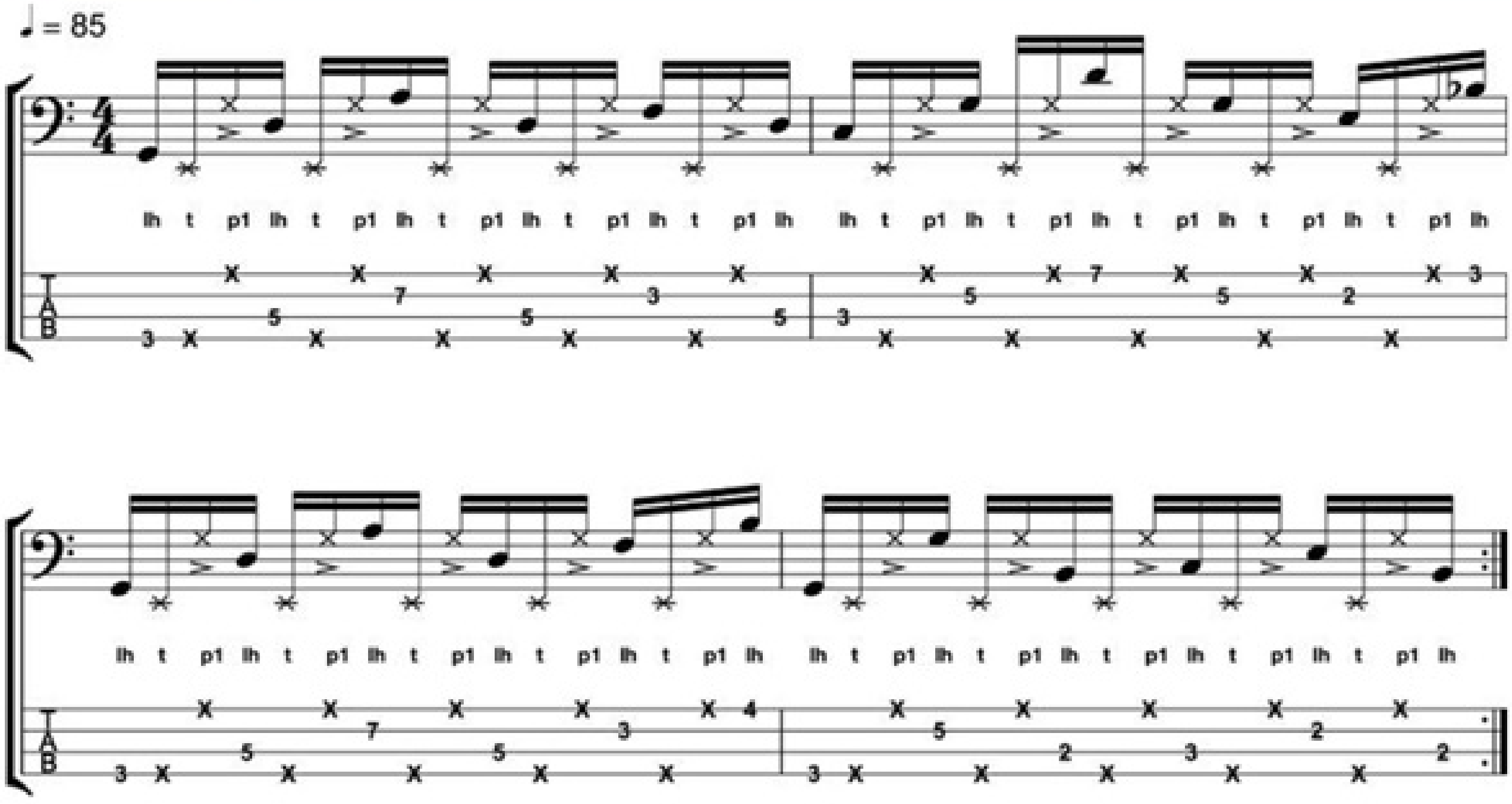
Example 1 reintroduces and refreshes the left-hand slapping techniques from last month's bass shenanigans. If you recall, the left-hand slapping technique is reminiscent of a conventional hammer-on, whereby the pitch is generated by assertively slapping down the index or middle finger of your fretting hand upon the required pitch. Get this right and you'll free up your plucking hand, enabling it to deliver a variety of additional performance components, while also allowing you to access an array of percussive elements.

It's inevitable that you'll encounter the odd speed bump when attempting a new performance skill,

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



especially one that requires a high level of preparation to execute efficiently. Traditionally, performing a note in a conventional manner necessitates you to fret with one hand while plucking with the other. Thankfully, the redundant area of the string that resides on the nut side of the fretting hand becomes naturally muted due to how your hands work in conjunction to one another.

With today's technique the string does have a tendency to vibrate on either side of the intended pitch, thus producing overtones and string noise. To help alleviate this unwanted symphony, fret wraps can be employed to help aid string muting. However, if you're old-school like me, just steal a 'scrunchie' from your girlfriend's toiletries bag and situate it over the strings of your bass adjacent to the nut. It works a treat, with the added benefit of being cheap as chips!

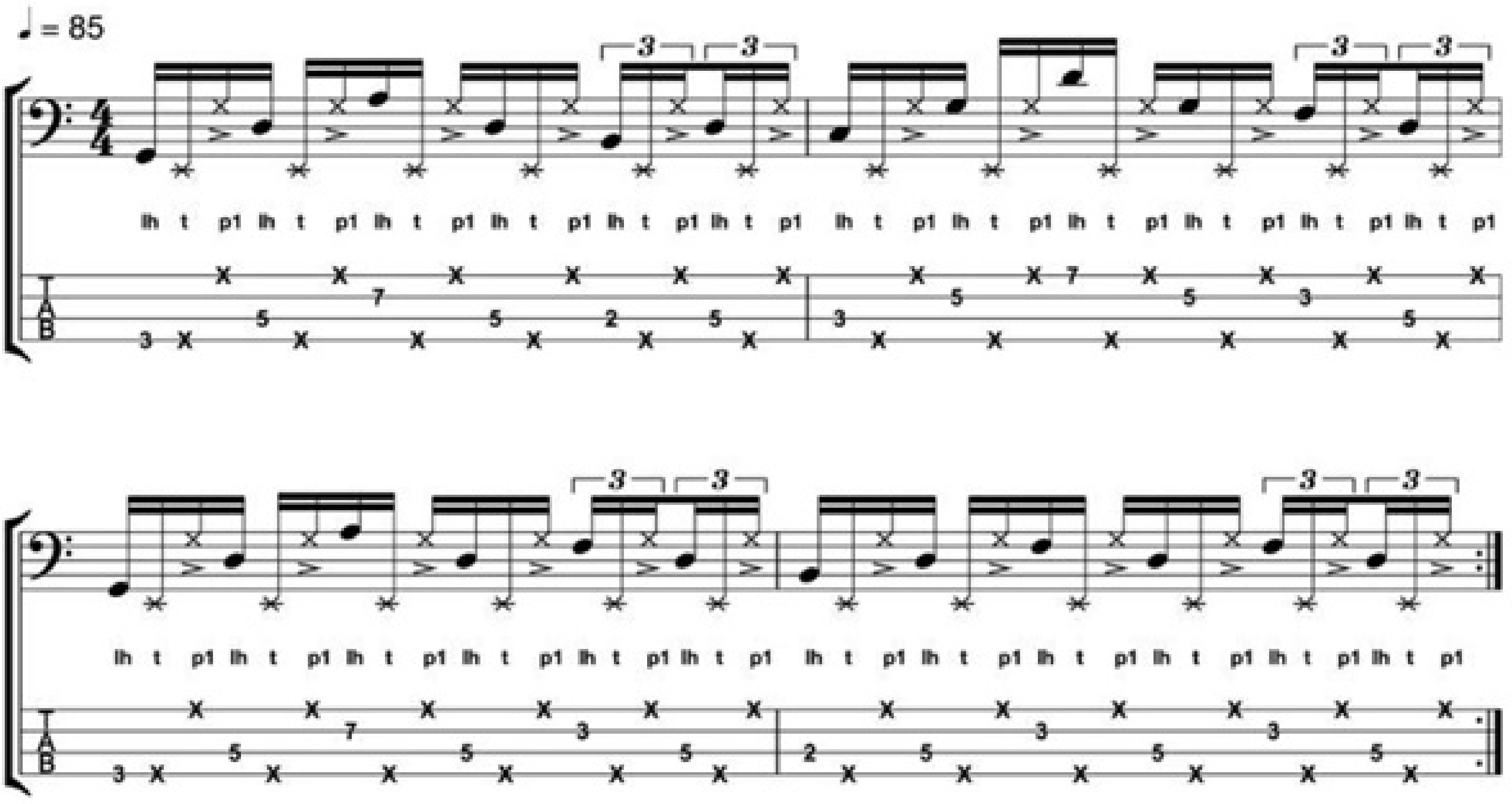
Example 2 introduces melodic intervals of 9ths to our slap bass. As with all 'compound' vocabulary, if you have difficulty verifying the diatonic position of a pitch, think of it as residing in its 'simple' register before then repositioning the note up an octave.

Semiquaver triplets are a rhythmical subdivision that feature heavily on the final beat of each of the following bars. Although **Example 3** continues with the same initial fretting hand slap technique, the aforementioned 'machine gun' triplets play a vital part in generating rhythmic diversity throughout the piece. Ensure that you are accurately portraying the intended rhythm, remembering that three semiquavers are presented in the same time measure as a single quaver at all times.

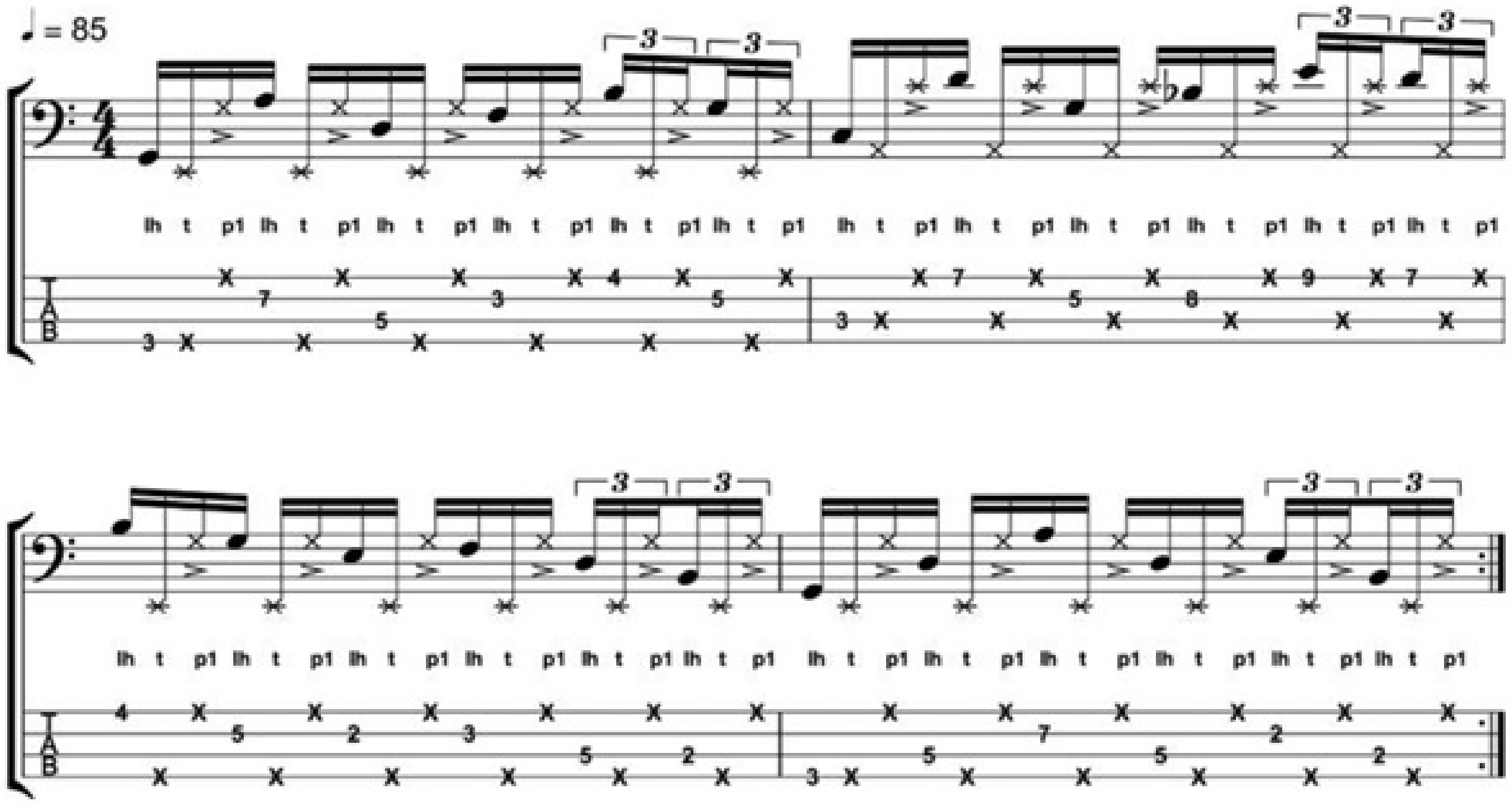
As in **Example 4**, diatonic 10ths are a particularly satisfying interval to play on the bass guitar. Good examples of their application can be heard in seminal recordings from the likes of Stanley Clarke and Mark King.

Intended to help improve your ability to deliver 10th intervals, each bar of the next exercise has been generated from the coinciding diatonic position of the harmonised G major scale. Although this particular example only focuses on the first four chord types, feel free to reproduce the formula over the entire harmonic series, as facilitated learning.

EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



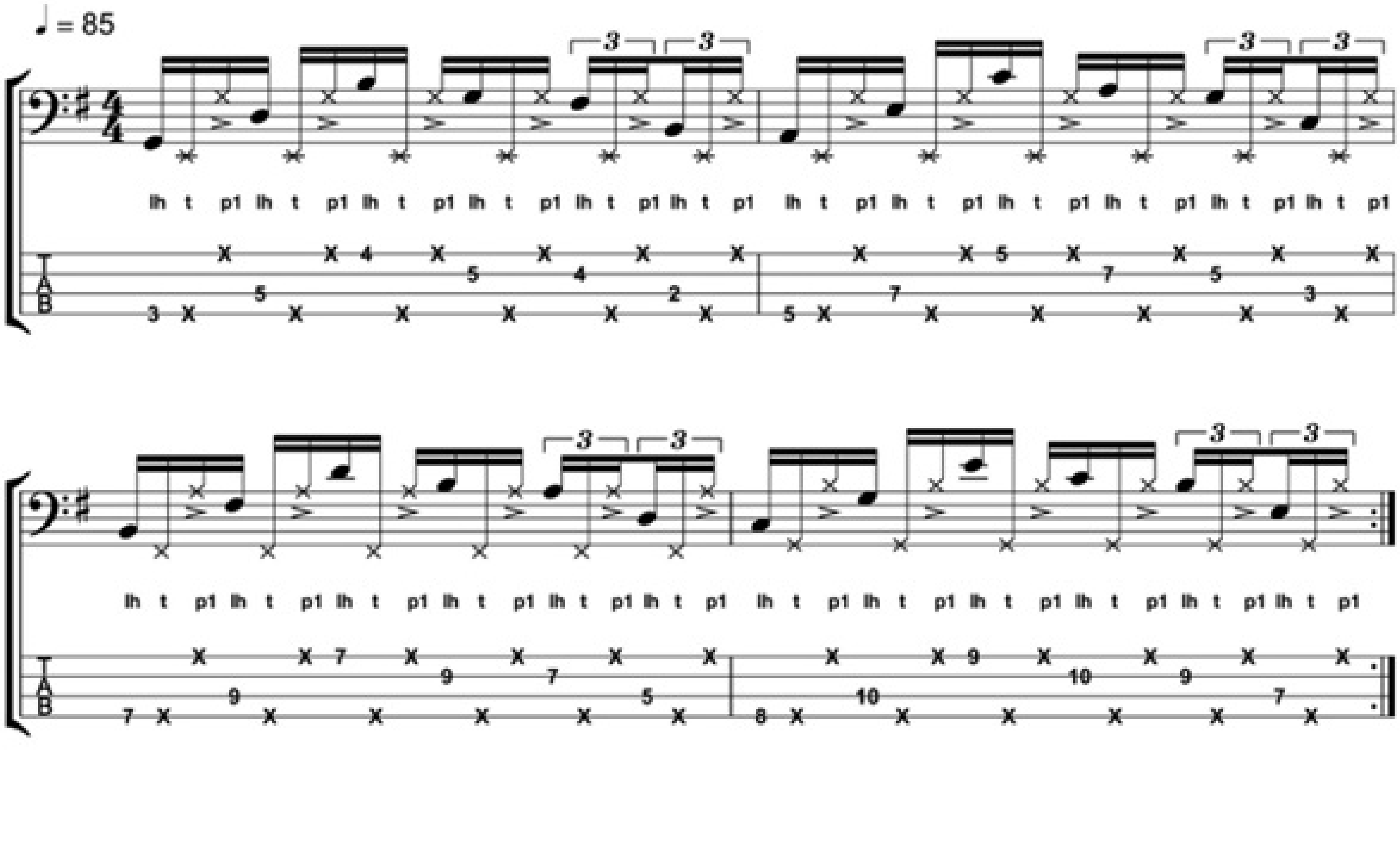
> "IT'S INEVITABLE THAT YOU'LL ENCOUNTER THE ODD SPEED BUMP WHEN ATTEMPTING A NEW PERFORMANCE SKILL, ESPECIALLY ONE THAT REQUIRES A HIGH LEVEL OF PREPARATION TO EXECUTE EFFICIENTLY. TRADITIONALLY, PERFORMING A NOTE IN A CONVENTIONAL MANNER NECESSITATES YOU TO FRET WITH ONE HAND WHILE PLUCKING WITH THE OTHER"

Phil Mann at the London Bass Guitar Show

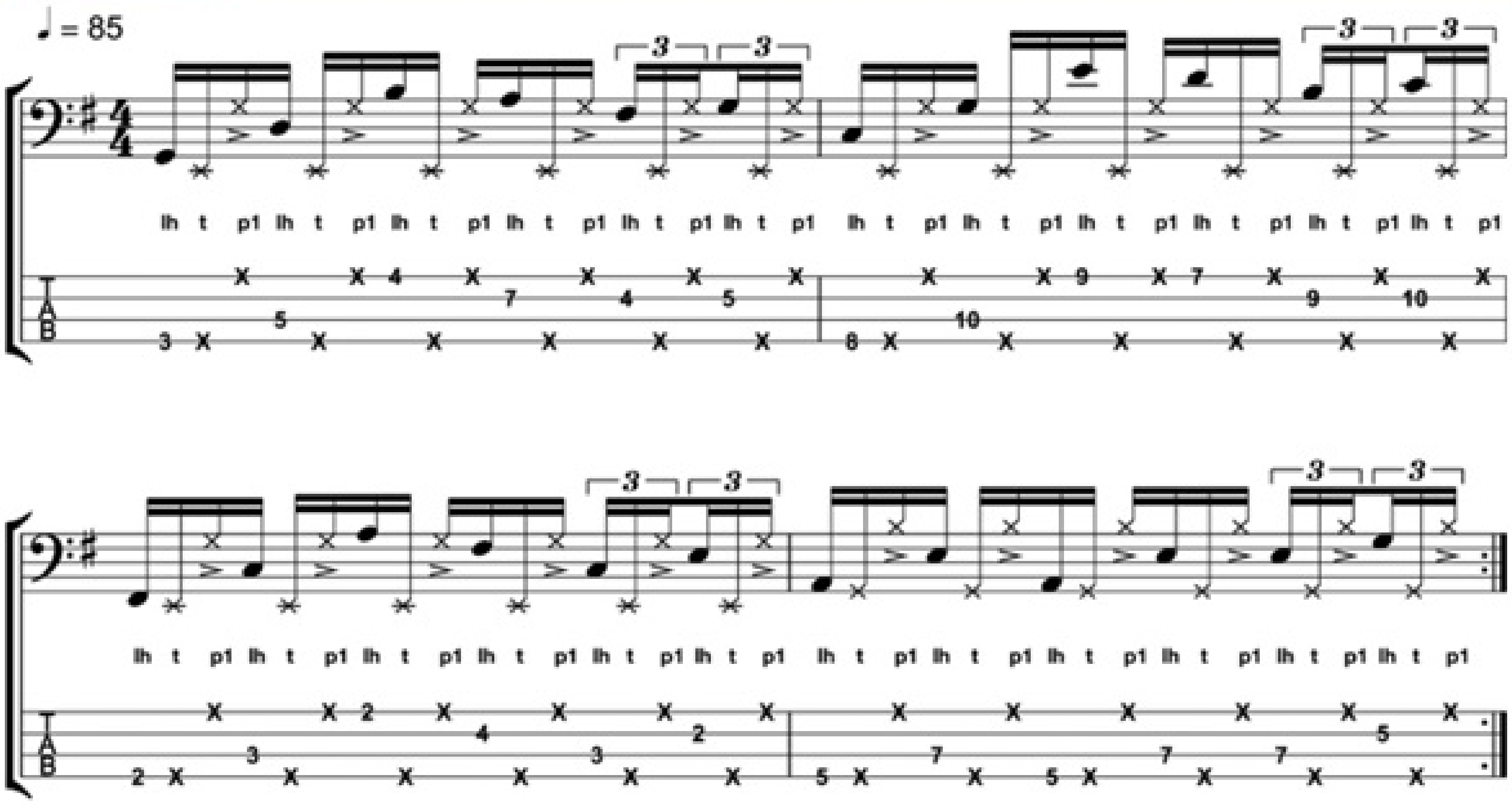
Drawing on the rudiments of the previous exercise, this month's sixth example applies various semiquaver slap permutations to a consistent rhythmic delivery. Be aware that the following four bars are composed from a slightly unconventional G major chord progression, but once you've got your ears around it – and perhaps enhanced your sound with a little chorus – it's an enjoyable one.

Our penultimate exercise combines your experience of semiquaver triplet patterns with double plucking, an area of study that we will go on to in great depth next month. Focusing on the melodic content found in beat one of the first bar, use your left hand to slap down the initial pitch

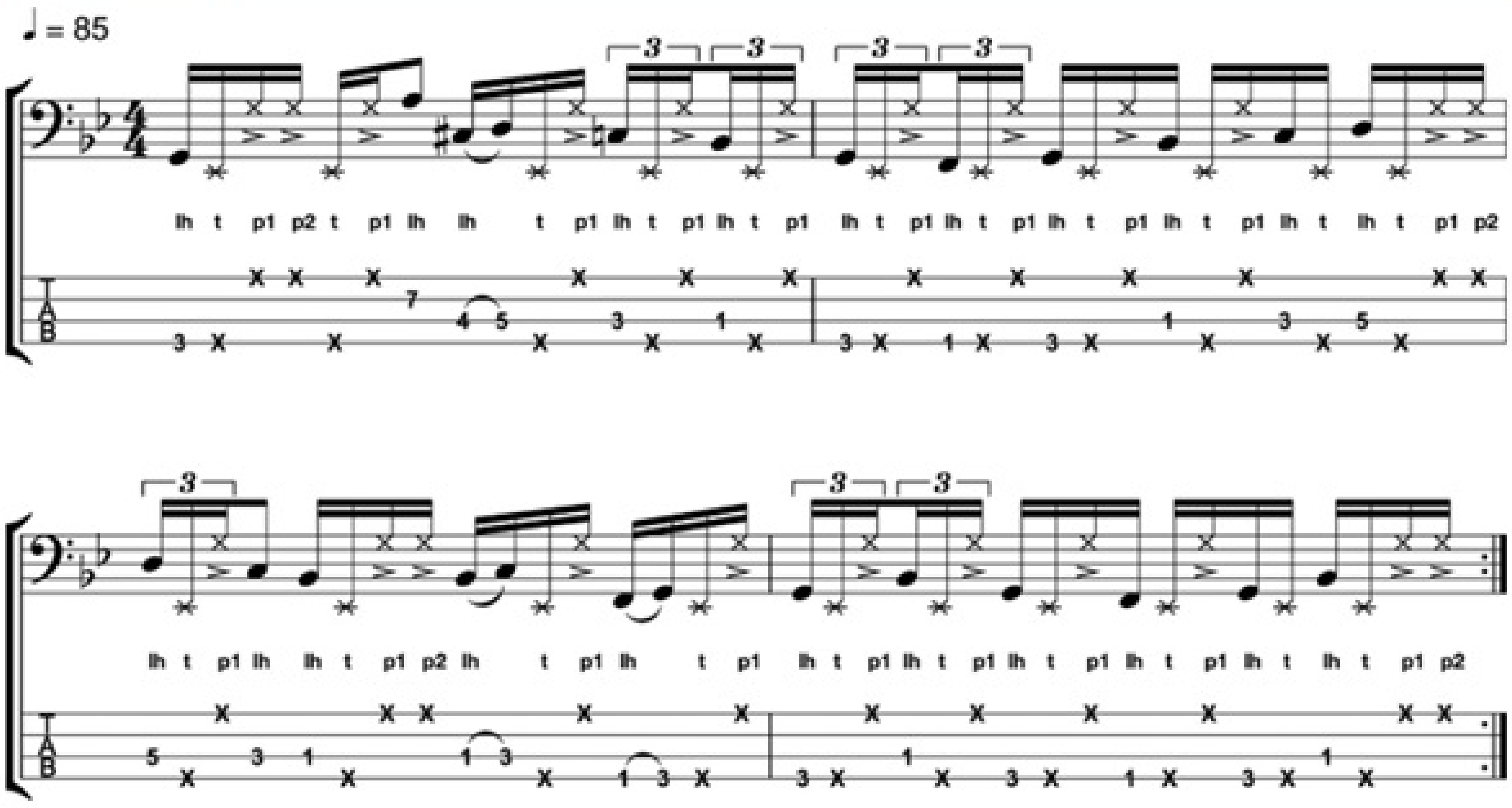
EXAMPLE 5



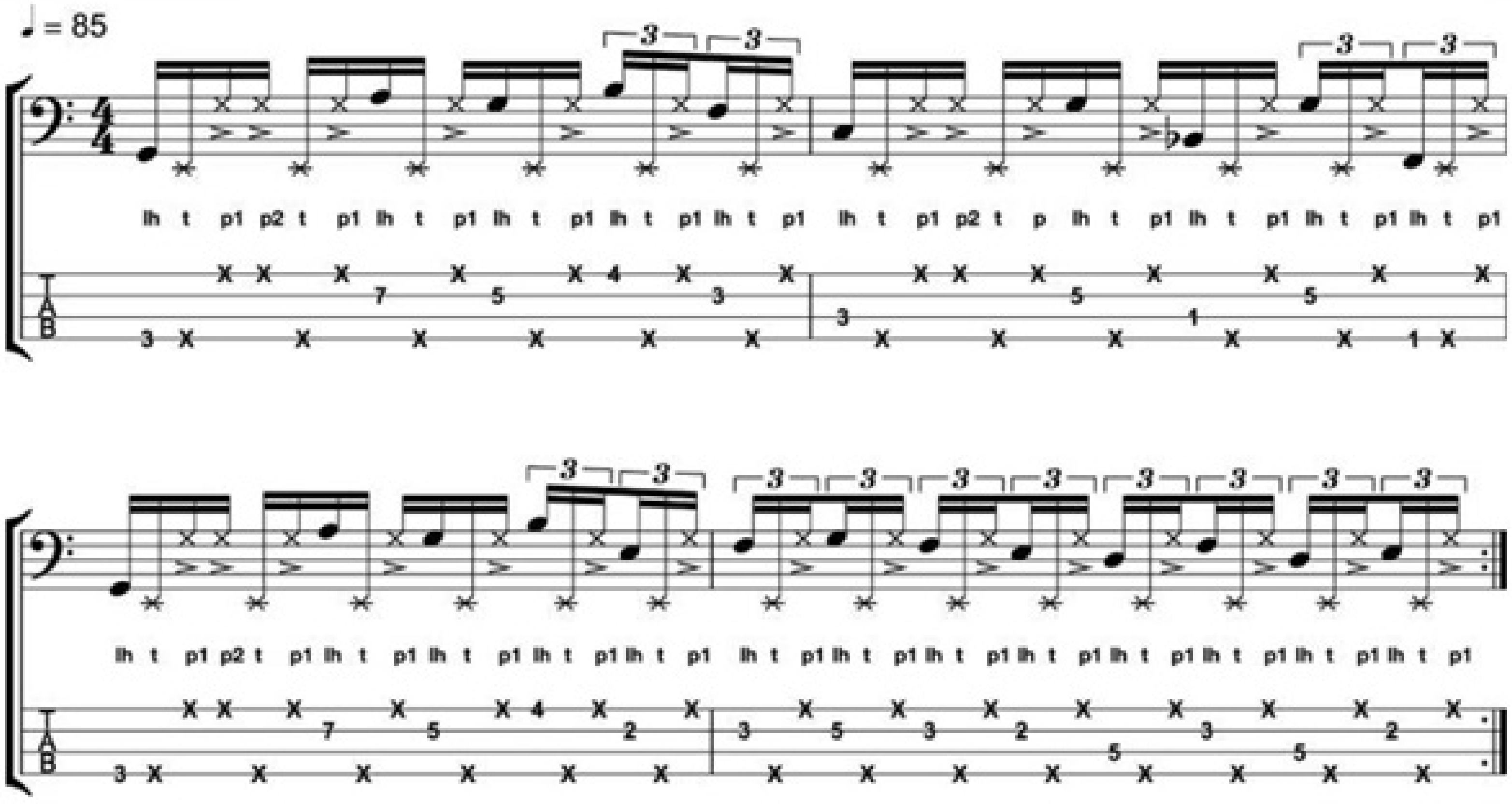
EXAMPLE 6



EXAMPLE 7



EXAMPLE 8



of G before then enhancing it with three subsequent dead notes. The first is generated from a thumbed ghost note on the E string before the second and third are produced via two plucks from your index and middle fingers, respectively.

Miles Davis said, "Music is the space between the notes. It's not the notes you play; it's the notes you don't play." However, I'm afraid if the multiple Grammy-winner was still alive today and able to see this last exercise, he'd sigh and then fervently punch me square in the face. To put it bluntly, this month's final endeavour presents a sea of dead notes and subdivisions so dense that there's hardly enough space for a rest the size of a cigarette paper. Until next time, practise hard!

LOSE YOURSELF IN A WORLD OF
Vinyl
FIND YOURSELF IN
OXFAM'S ONLINE SHOP
oxfam.org.uk/shop
COLUMBIA
TIME ON MY HANDS
OXFAM

ADVERTISING INDEX

Warwick 3, 37

Rotosound 7

Bass Direct 9

Ashdown Engineering 21

Stonefield Musical Instrument Co. 13

Trace Elliott 15

Aguilar Amplification 59

Spector Basses 91

DR Strings 43

Orange Amplification 51

Aria Ltd. 11

Vanderkley Amplification 55

Promenade 27

Radial Engineering 19

ToneTech 31

Synergy Distribution 2

Thomann 72,73

Strings & Things .... OSBC

TO ADVERTISE HERE CONTACT GUY ON

07506 197114

guy.meredith@futurenet.com

ADVERTISE IN BASS TODAY!

Call now on

01225 687414

*Find out more about advertising with Future on **www.futureplc.com**.*

★★★

Classic

BASS ALBUMS

★★★

Thirty years since Jaco Pastorius left us, Mike Brooks celebrates one of his greatest album performances

As we approach the 30th anniversary of Jaco Pastorius's passing, and the 40th anniversary of the release of *Heavy Weather*, there seems no better time to evaluate an album that essentially brought the Pastorius phenomenon into the public consciousness. Jaco's legendary, self-titled solo LP – released a year earlier, in August 1976 – had caused musicians the world over to talk about the new god of electric bass. However, it was the release of *Heavy Weather* that fully illuminated his sheer ability as a bandmember. Having played on Weather Report's previous album, *Black Market*, Jaco was now a permanent fixture in the band following Alphonso Johnson's departure. Although *Black Market* was successful, *Heavy Weather* needed to improve upon it, and so it did, becoming a worldwide smash, reaching number one on the US jazz charts and finally sealing the band's reputation.

Bass, mandocello, drums and steel drums are all credited to Jaco in the liner notes – and in 'Teen Town', he created a signature piece that is forever identified with him. His 1962 Fender Jazz, the 'Bass Of Doom', was fitted with Rotosound Swing Bass roundwound strings, each with a different silk winding. Martin Howe, formerly of Rotosound, is quoted as saying that Jaco felt each string represented a different colour: he used regular 66L sets (045, 065, 080 and 105). The bass was plugged into Acoustic 360 amplifiers and Acoustic cabinets as required and then mic-ed up, although it is possible that a DI feed was also taken.

'Birdland' opens the album. The first we hear of Jaco is his pinched harmonic melody at 0'19", and from that point on, we could highlight enough flourishes and bass moments in this one song to fill this entire page. The song sounds as fresh and vibrant today as it did back in 1977: as bassists, we can all recall the first time we heard it.

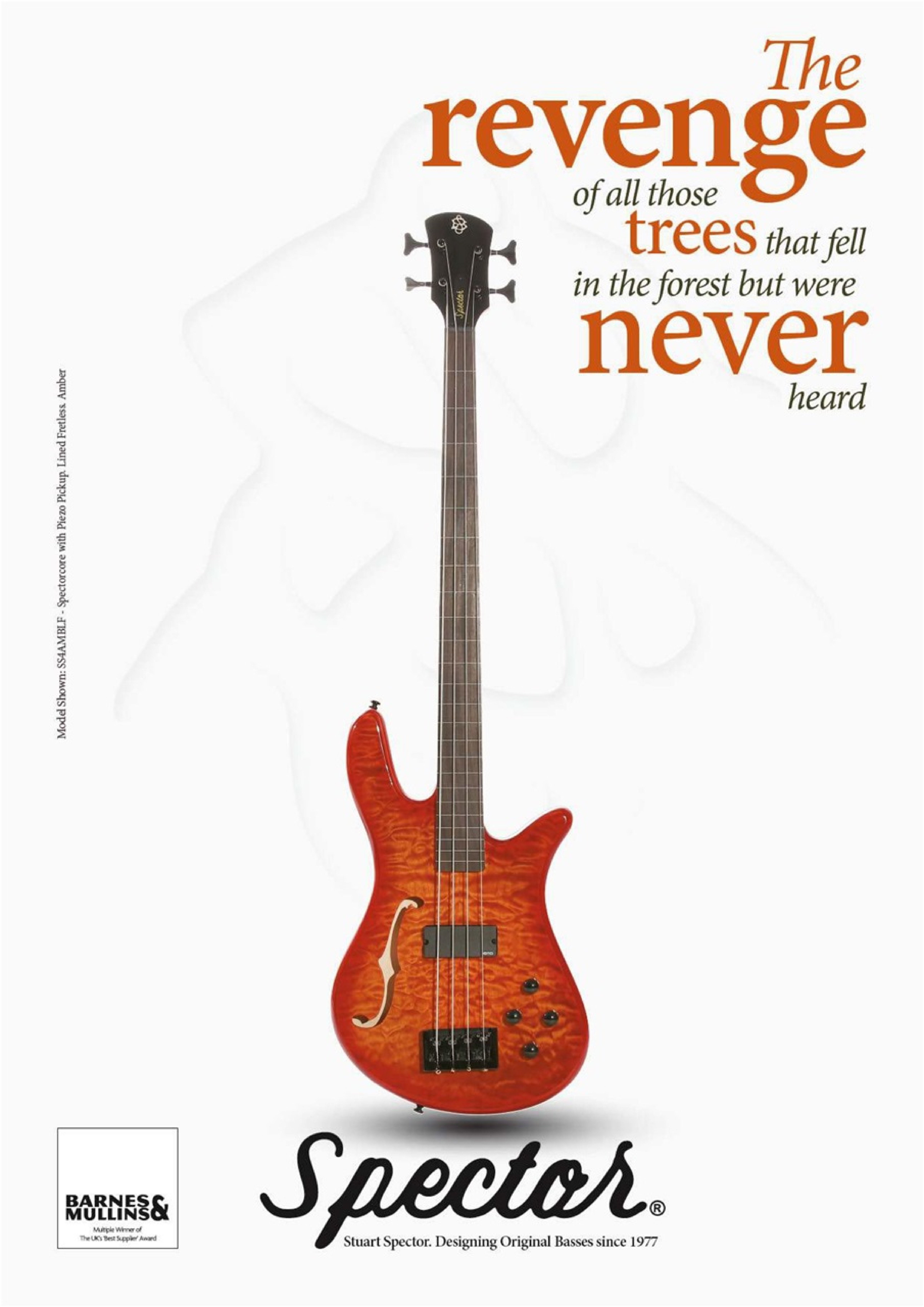
'A Remark You Made' showcases Jaco's elegant playing, proving that he wasn't just about flurries of notes and energy: when a song required a fluid legato approach, he was equally capable. His tone is sublime, the epoxied fingerboard making every roundwound-fuelled note ring out and sustain when required. No wonder his playing turned heads wherever he went.

'Teen Town' hardly needs an introduction: it's synonymous with Jaco. The bass tone is thick and biting with a hint of distortion, and meshes perfectly with the open hi-hat pattern and Wayne Shorter's melodic motifs on saxophone. The genius moments of the piece are its open spaces: presented with a blank canvas, the whole band let the music breathe while Jaco lays down a legendary bass track.

'Harlequin' sees Jaco deliver a more supportive part, yet his identifiable tone still stands out a mile. 'Palladium', with its Latin jazz flavour, is a great vehicle for his immensely strong groove playing, and for many Jaco fans 'Havona' is quintessential Pastorius. His command of his instrument is breathtaking.

The problem with writing about Jaco's bass-playing is that there's never enough space to cover every detail and nuance that needs covering and highlighting. Let's just say that *Heavy Weather* put both Weather Report and Mr Pastorius firmly on the musical map, which is why the album is still talked about so warmly 40 years later. As a musical statement, it has barely aged.

> "THE PROBLEM WITH WRITING ABOUT JACO'S BASS-PLAYING IS THAT THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH SPACE TO COVER EVERY DETAIL AND NUANCE THAT NEEDS COVERING AND HIGHLIGHTING"


The revenge
of all those trees that fell
in the forest but were never
heard
Model Shown: SS4AMBLF - Spectorcore with Piezo Pickup. Lined Fretless. Amber
Spector®
Stuart Spector. Designing Original Basses since 1977
BARNES & MULLINS
Multiple Winner of
The UK's 'Best Supplier' Award

LEGENDARY LOW END

STINGRAY5
30
1987 - 2017
ANNIVERSARY

Since its introduction in 1987, the StingRay5 has been embraced as one of the world's most innovative bass designs. To celebrate, Ernie Ball Music Man is proud to introduce the 30th Anniversary StingRay5, featuring a limited edition finish and re-voiced preamp, providing both ample punch and added articulation.

Available Now

ERNIE BALL
MUSIC MAN®

music-man.com